



IT IS NOT OFTEN that it falls to a publisher to announce an event of international drama -the flight through the Iron Curtain of a Communist leader, and his concealment, in daily fear of his life, by British agents just across the frontier in West Berlin.

Robert Bialek's rapid rise as Founder Member of the Communist Youth Movement in East Germany to the post of Inspector General of the People's Police was originally due to his uncanny power as an agitator and spell-binder. He had become a dangerous force before he was twenty, when he was a leading spirit of the Communist Youth opposition in Breslau, working underground against the Nazis. In 1936 he was caught and placed in a concentration camp, where he contracted tuberculosis; and it was for this reason, in an unexpected access of humanitarianism, that he was released in 1940 on condition that he would never again engage in anti-Nazi activities. Nevertheless, by the Spring of 1942, the irrepressible Bialek, cured of his disease and rather startlingly disguised as a woman, was in action once again, and continued his agitation against Hitler until the Russians reached Breslau in 1945.

The Communists needed men like Bialek, and it was natural that he at once achieved high office in the Russian Zone, and, later, in the East German Republic. But his fiery spirit soon began to militate against the increasing chicanery and corruption which he found in high Party circles, and it was typical of the man that when the Central Committee demanded that he must publicly confess his error, in the interests of

Party discipline, in a matter on which he was privately informed that he was right, he flatly refused to do so. But it was the great upsurge of rioting on the 17th June, 1953 that finally convinced Robert Bialek that he had been wrong in accepting the fusion of Communists and Socialists in 1946, and finally confirmed him in his disillusionment with the Party policy and dictatorship.

Bialek is now only 39, and more will be heard of him in the near future. At the moment he is broadcasting regularly each week to the Soviet Zone from West Berlin, addressing himself entirely to industrial workers, who are once again falling under the spell of his passionate power of oratory. This book is the vivid and breathtaking story of his life to date, written at first hand from his conversations and notes, and should throw an entirely new light on the 'German Problem' as it exists today.

THE BIALEK AFFAIR



ROBERT BIAFK

Photo by Mark Gerson

THE BIALEK AFFAIR

by

Stewart Thomson

in collaboration with Robert Bialek



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Foreword

EARLY IN the morning of 27th August, 1953, a short, thickset man of thirty-eight walked with calm deliberation along the narrow pavement that fringes the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. He was wearing a fawn raincoat and a snap-brimmed brown felt hat that shadowed his face. Under his left arm was a well-worn, bulky despatch case, such as Germans of all classes habitually carry. He was walking westwards.

The Potsdamer Platz is a large square that straddles the boundary between East and West Berlin, between the Soviet and the Western sectors of the city. At that time of the morning it was virtually deserted. As the solitary pedestrian approached the boundary, two armed People's Policemen paused in their patrol to scrutinize him but made no move to detain him. Had they asked to see his papers, he would have made a dash for it and, with luck, would have reached the Western side alive under a hail of bullets. Had he attempted the same solitary walk twenty-four hours later, he would certainly have been challenged, for his arrest as "an enemy of the German Democratic Republic" was imminent.

From the nearest West Berlin Post Office he despatched a brief telegram to his wife in West Germany: "Forced to flee. Await further news." Then he walked to a Police Station and enquired where he should report as a refugee. The policeman on duty barely glanced up as he directed him to the Refugee Reception camp at Marienfelde. Over quarter of a million refugees had made similar enquiries in West Berlin during the past eight months alone.

At Marienfelde camp, however, the new arrival aroused immediate interest. To the trained interrogators with their specialized knowledge of the so-called German Democratic Republic the name Robert Bialek meant something. His record, of which he made no secret, filled up the gaps in their memories: a Communist of long standing, who had played a vital role in the Soviet Zone of Germany, especially in the early post-war years, as a co-founder of the Communist Youth Movement, as one of the regime's most successful "agitators", as an Inspector-General of the People's Police when the first units of the present East German Army were being set up.

Bialek's record also told of years spent in and out of Nazi prisons and concentration camps, of active underground resistance to the Nazis under constant threat of torture and death, but to the great majority of Germans, who accepted Adolf Hitler and even, in many cases, wore his Party badge, any reminder of the past is naturally distasteful.

Robert Bialek was not exactly well received in West Berlin. That was, on the face of it, understandable. He himself did not expect otherwise. He fell into neither of the two familiar categories of refugees. Of the half-million people who fled the Soviet Zone of Germany and the Soviet sector of Berlin in 1952 and 1953, about four out of every five were "recognized" as political or economic victims of the Soviet Zone regime. Most of the others were vagabonds, tramps, criminals: men on the run. Bialek was on the run but not for any readily acceptable reason. Repentance, in such a case, is not rated high as a motive. Bialek had seen the error of his and his Party's ways but these ways had not been unsuccessful. Among the thousands of victims and failures Bialek stood out to a suspicious degree. The long spoon was, so to speak, branded on his forehead.

The very fact of having supped with the Communist devil, which aroused an instinctive hostility in fellow-Germans only just liberated from a devil of another hue, was bound to intrigue rather than antagonize the British authorities in West Berlin. For them Bialek was an all-too rare source of first-hand information. He not only knew the puppets of Germany's Soviet

Zone but had himself been one of them. In his case, however, the string-pulling had induced not obedience but rebellion.

Bialek had been a rebel most of his life. He was born into a poor working-class family in Breslau in 1915. His early years were spent in the poverty and unemployment of the Weimar Republic. He was a militant member of the Social Democratic Youth Movement, when the Nazi Storm Troopers began their raids on the working-class district of Breslau, and it was in the sporadic street-fighting of the early thirties that Bialek made his first contact with Communists. But not till Hitler came to power in 1933 and the Social Democratic Party collapsed almost overnight did he become part of a Communist underground organization.

The turning point had already come some months earlier, on July 20th, 1932, when Chancellor Franz von Papen forced the Socialist Minister President of Prussia, Otto Braun, and the Minister of the Interior, Carl Severing, to resign. Bialek, together with thousands of other workers, stood before the Trades Union Headquarters in Breslau waiting impatiently for the announcement that a general strike had been declared. Instead, the crowd was asked to disperse quietly and return home. Six months later Adolf Hitler was Chancellor.

There were only three courses of action open to the individual anti-Nazi. He could leave the country. But that required funds and contacts abroad; these were available in the case of Communists almost exclusively to very senior members of the Party, some of whom—President Pieck and Deputy Premier Ulbricht among them—acquired Soviet citizenship during their exile. The path chosen by the great majority was resignation, and, in many cases, Hitler's subsequent triumphs turned resignation to enthusiasm. To a minority, however, of which Robert Bialek was one, flight was impracticable, acceptance unthinkable. It is even doubtful if, given the facilities to escape, he would have availed himself of them. He had developed, to an exceptional degree, what the Germans call "*Geltungsbedürfnis*", a profound—almost pathological—need for social justification.

The most potent factors in Bialek's childhood had been the drunkenness, chronic unemployment and remarkable physique

of his father, the frailty and devotion of his mother, the sneers of his schoolmates. To these influences Bialek himself admits openly, and I think them worth mentioning, not merely because they put "THE BIALEK AFFAIR" into perspective but also because they seem to me to represent the kind of human soil in which Communism most readily takes root. Bialek, even in his early teens, was never in any danger of becoming a Nazi. Yet on his own confession his behaviour was sometimes, of necessity, almost indistinguishable from that of the Storm Troopers. He had applied himself with astonishing will-power to hardening and training his body, to mastering the art of boxing and ju-jitsu, long before he was called upon to apply them in the streets of Breslau against Hitler's hooligans. His original aim in life was to be able to "beat the daylight" out of any boy who mocked him for his poverty. As he himself was only of medium build, he preferred to tackle the biggest of his potential adversaries, largely because he was mortally afraid of fear. Some fifteen years later, undernourished and weakened by tuberculosis, he thrashed a man twice his size in a Nazi prison for precisely the same reason.

Like most of his generation Bialek was educated in violence, and there were moments when he came perilously near to finding in it, as the Nazis did, a form of self-expression instead of a necessary means of self-defence. Hardly a day of his first thirty years passed without a sense of danger, without the instinct to meet it half-way. Even nature took a hand in it when she cast a blemish on his lung.

There were two critical points in these thirty years. Joining the Communist Party was not one of them. By 1933 the Social Democratic Party had virtually collapsed, its leaders either in concentration camps or in exile, its rank and file drifting into the wake of the Nazis or the Communist Party. For the Communists, although they too were leaderless, managed to retain the rudiments of their organization. Bialek, as a Marxist, had no crisis of conscience, and, as a militant anti-Nazi, he had no alternative.

His first crisis when it came, was, not unnaturally, a crisis of loyalty. Late in November 1934 he and other members of the

resistance group were arrested by the Gestapo. The next eighteen months were spent in "protective custody": torture, endless interrogations, more torture. The Gestapo finally succeeded in tricking one of his accomplices into confession but Bialek held out. He talks about it quite readily, without boasting, even without noticeable pride, but, strangely enough, he also bears no rancour. Those eighteen months of hell represent one of the great experiences of his life. His particular hell came just before his trial.

While he was in the civil prison, safely, as he thought, out of the hands of the Gestapo, he agreed with his cellmate to make an attempt to escape and smuggled out a note through his mother to a Party contact outside. His accomplice, however, proved to be a Gestapo stool-pigeon and Bialek found himself back in Gestapo headquarters confronted by his mother. She pleaded with him not to betray anyone for her sake and for thirty-six hours she was forced to stand, face to the wall, within sight of him. Each time she dropped in a faint a bucket of water was flung over her. Finally even that failed to revive her and she was taken away. After a further ten hours Bialek too was removed, torn between pride in his mother and bitter remorse.

The second crisis came after his release three and a half years later. He effected his release by the same trick of casuistry as he and other Party members had employed to explain away Stalin's Pact with Hitler: the end justified the means. He gave the Gestapo names of several ex-members of the resistance group, knowing that all of them had escaped abroad. A perfectly legitimate "betrayal", with which the Gestapo, surprisingly, seemed quite satisfied. He could only assume that his parlous physical condition was the explanation. The truth was not so simple. Before his release Bialek signed a declaration promising to undertake no further illegal activities and to report any former associates who might contact him. He had of course, no intention of keeping his promise and the Gestapo must have realized that. The last laugh was with them.

Within a few weeks of his release Bialek was in touch with old resistance colleagues, only to find that the Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939 had seriously demoralized most of them. If

Stalin had chosen to declare a truce with the Nazis, why should they continue fighting? Besides, Hitler's victories had also produced their effect, and since the outbreak of war the Gestapo had intensified its security measures. One day the tide would turn, then. . . .

Bialek was bitterly disillusioned. Then it began to dawn on him that he had heard only half the answer. The Gestapo had adopted the obvious expedient of pulling in one of his former friends for questioning and showing him the declaration Bialek had signed. The few who knew him intimately naturally assumed that he had signed under duress and therefore without any personal commitment. But there were others who had doubts.

It was a tremendous blow to Bialek's pride and self-confidence. The years of torture and imprisonment seemed to have been rendered worthless overnight. For two years he remained in the seclusion of a Breslau garage, acquiring a fund of technical knowledge that was to prove invaluable later on. Then, one evening in May 1942, a young man appeared at the garage and waited unobtrusively till everyone else was gone. Bialek agreed, almost without hesitation, to resume work for the underground.

* * *

When I first met Robert Bialek, in February 1954 at the time of the Berlin Conference, he was living once again like a hunted man, leaving his flat in West Berlin only at nightfall, opening the door only to those who rang a prearranged signal on the bell. Such apparently melodramatic precautions were necessary. The Communists in the Soviet Zone had every interest in kidnapping Robert Bialek, if they could lay their hands on him. The purpose of this book is to explain why.

My purpose in February 1954, however, was a more immediate one: to hear Bialek's story and decide whether it would be of interest to the people in East Germany. It obviously was. I made it clear to Bialek that, if he decided to broadcast from London while remaining in Berlin, his safety would be still further endangered. He brushed that aside rather impatiently.

Once a week for over a year he broadcast to the Soviet Zone of Germany, addressing himself particularly to the lower functionaries and rank and file of the Socialist Unity Party. He gave them inside information which is otherwise denied them. He told them how their elections are rigged, how their Trades Union rights are denied them, how the economic machine is geared not to the welfare of the proletariat but to the fulfilment of a superimposed Plan. Gradually, step by step, he laid bare the gulf between the theory of Marxism and the practice of present-day Communism.

In writing this book I have drawn heavily on these broadcasts and I would like to thank the B.B.C. for allowing me to do so. My thanks also go to Mr. Lindley Fraser for the advice and guidance which he so readily gave and which I so gladly accepted. My main debt, however, is to Robert Bialek himself, without whose constant collaboration this book could not have been written. . . .

STEWART THOMSON

I

IT WAS ten minutes to seven on a cold January evening in 1944 when I entered the Café Brand Malcomess in Breslau. My appointment was for seven, but I had come early on purpose. Everything in me rebelled against this pre-arranged meeting. From the very first moment, more than two weeks before, when one of my colleagues in the Resistance movement had mentioned that a Polish Resistance agent was in Breslau and was anxious to contact me, I had felt an instinctive reluctance to accept the invitation. As the leader of the Resistance group, I could have overruled my friends—for I soon found myself in a minority of one—but I could not rationalize my fears and they were delighted at the thought of linking up with the Poles and thereby extending our activities. So in the end I had given way.

Sitting now at a table well to the rear of the café, where I could observe anyone coming in and also most of the other tables, I milled over my personal doubts for the hundredth time. They were based, as I well knew, not on the reliability of the Polish agent, whom I had not yet met, but on a purely irrational feeling that there was something wrong. But my main preoccupation was to take no unnecessary risks with an underground organization, which I had built up laboriously after spending five and a half years in the hands of the Gestapo, and which in eighteen months had grown from a membership of three to one hundred and fifty-seven, half of them equipped with small arms. During all that time, with an invaluable contact in the General Staff in Russia and with constant

information and sabotage work, we had lost only two men to the Gestapo. I was afraid, desperately afraid, that this quite unforeseen development might be the trap that we were fated to fall into.

My worst fears seemed confirmed a few minutes later. My colleague, Standke, had barely arrived and sat down at a table near mine, when a tall thin man of about thirty joined him. He had very fair hair and blue eyes and a strong jaw. He had a trick, when he spoke, of narrowing and widening his eyes. He looked to me like the typical S.S. officer. A first impression of that kind was, of course, not conclusive, but all my doubts came crowding back. I was relieved now that I had asked Standke to give me a chance of observing him at close quarters before I actually met him.

Then something happened that sent a shudder of apprehension through me. I glanced to my left and met a pair of eyes studying me intently over a newspaper. They dropped immediately behind the paper again, but I now felt quite certain that this whole arrangement had been a ghastly mistake.

It is impossible for anyone who has not spent years in prisons and concentration camps to understand the sickening, physical sense of dread one can feel on such occasions. It is not fear in the conventional sense but a sort of conditioned reflex of the body resulting from privation and torture. And I knew that, if the Gestapo caught me a second time at underground work, they would execute me without a trial. As a Communist, I should in any case have suffered the fate of so many of my comrades; only a near-fatal attack of tuberculosis had, ironically, saved my life.

I left the café and hurried to a nearby square where another member of the Resistance group, Max, was waiting. I told him to go back to the café and follow the man with the blue suit whom I had caught observing me.

Standke and Max reappeared together. The man in the blue suit was gone. Standke, however, was merely amused by my nervousness. The Pole had confessed that he was shadowed by one of his own men wherever he went.

I should have been reassured, but I could not shake off the

feeling that we were all in danger. Once again I allowed myself to be overruled and a meeting was arranged at Standke's flat for January 21st at eight o'clock.

The Pole, who introduced himself as Müller, was on time. He spoke perfect German without the slightest trace of accent. Once he had established that I was the leader of the Resistance group in Breslau, he wasted no time in making proposals for common action with the Polish Resistance movement. Stalingrad, he claimed, had practically fallen. 90,000 Polish partisans were merely waiting for the Russian counter-offensive to attack the Germans from the rear. Our job was to be the destruction of bridges and other strategic targets.

Max and Standke were clearly impressed by Müller's ambitious project, and I, too, was half won over. But I found myself wondering if a genuine Resistance leader would have given away quite as many details of his movement as Müller had done at our first meeting.

I decided to ask him a few questions. Where had he learned to speak such perfect German? Was he living in Breslau, and, if not, how was he able to stay so long? And what possibilities did the Polish Resistance movement have to keep in constant touch with us?

He had a satisfactory answer to all three questions. He had a German mother and spoke not only German and Polish but also Russian fluently. He was living in Kattowitz but could, if necessary, move to Breslau. Contact and co-operation with us would be easy because the Polish Resistance movement had cells among the Polish forced labour.

His ready and apparently satisfactory replies made my fears seem groundless and even uncharitable. I suggested that we continue our discussion in my flat. We arrived there about eleven at night. My wife was still awake. I introduced Müller to her as a business friend and, after she had made coffee, she retired to bed. Then Müller asked me for details of the Resistance group. It was, in the circumstances, a perfectly understandable question, but I was not yet prepared to be too communicative. I merely told him our strength and our state of readiness to move into action as soon as the Germans

retreat began. The leadership was entirely Communist, but many of the rank and file members had no Party affiliations.

Then Müller made a suggestion that revived all my suspicions: a meeting of our two organizations somewhere in the Breslau area to choose common leaders. Müller was obviously irritated by my refusal but, when he saw that he could not persuade me to change my mind, he dropped his proposal as quickly as he had made it. We arranged to meet again in the Café Brand Malcomess on January 28th at eight o'clock in the evening.

As it happened, I had arranged to meet Standke the day before at seven. For the first time in two years he did not appear. As it was a firm rule that, if an appointment was missed, it must be kept at the same place twenty-four hours later, I turned up at seven the following evening. Again Standke failed to arrive, and I knew that he had been arrested. Everything pointed to Müller, yet I had no proof. I had arranged to meet him in less than an hour's time. Should I keep that appointment? I realized that I had to choose very quickly between assuming Müller's guilt and warning my colleagues to go to ground, and using my appointment with Müller to make certain of his guilt or innocence.

I finally decided to meet Müller but to take every precaution I could against my own arrest. The first thing to do was to fetch my revolver from the flat. I had very little time. I told my wife that, if I was not back by nine o'clock, she must assume I was dead and do everything conceivable to shield herself and the child. She must revile me in front of the Gestapo and swear that she had known nothing of my Resistance activities. Müller would have to bear her out that she knew him only as a business acquaintance of mine. If I survived, then I would somehow get in touch with her.

I knew something of what my wife was feeling, for her father had been executed by the Nazis. She pleaded with me to flee with her and the child, but where could we have gone? Europe was still occupied by the Nazis. There was no escape. I took a last look at the child, fast asleep in her cot, embraced my wife possibly for the last time and hurried off to keep my appoint-

ment. Even in that state of mind, punctuality still seemed important!

By the time I reached the café I had worked out a plan of action, which would at least give me an outside chance of escape, if the worst came to the worst. As soon as I entered the café, I knew that my plan would have to be tried, for even a casual glance told me that there were about a dozen men sitting conspicuously alone at various tables reading newspapers. The Gestapo were not always very subtle.

I found a table at the rear of the café, where I could sit with my back to the wall. My right hand grasped the revolver in my overcoat pocket. Strangely enough, all my chronic anxiety was gone. I was determined to shoot it out rather than be arrested.

I saw Müller, as he entered the café, glance quickly round the tables, as if to reassure himself that all his men were there, then he came straight over. He made no attempt to sit down.

"I can't stay," he said nervously. "Twenty of our people have been arrested and I'm in immediate danger myself. One of your chaps must be a traitor."

"Sit down," I said softly. "There aren't any spies in my organization and, even if there were one, he couldn't know anything about your people. Sit down."

He sank on to a chair to the right of me. I drew his eyes down to my right hand buried in my overcoat pocket.

"I have a revolver," I said softly. "I shan't hesitate to shoot you if you make one false move. Put both your hands on the table."

A rapid glance beyond him told me that, while several of his men were watching us surreptitiously, they did not seem to have noticed anything unusual. But the worst part was now to come.

"If I'm not out of here by ten minutes past eight," I continued in an undertone, "you and every man in this café will be killed."

I could see the fear leap in his eyes and the tiny beads of perspiration break on his forehead. He made no attempt to protest his innocence. He merely asked:

"How come?"

"You should have waited to arrest Standke till you could catch all of us," I said. "I have seven men out there with revolvers and light machine-guns. At ten past eight"—I glanced at my watch—"in six minutes from now, if I haven't walked out of here, they'll open fire through the windows. I'll be killed, too, of course, but, if I can take twelve Gestapo men with me, I'll die happy."

It was a colossal bluff but it was my only chance of getting out alive. And I knew from bitter experience that the Gestapo were bred on bluff. "We know who your friends are. They've talked." At first one was tempted, then one came to recognize that kind of trick. Would Müller see through it?

I think he probably did, but was not prepared to risk his life in order to challenge me. For he must have known that he, at least, would die.

"Stay exactly as you are," I warned him gently. "One word or one movement will be your last."

I got up slowly and began to make my way to the door, circling a few tables so that I could watch him from the tail of my eye. He did not move, although I noticed that his men were looking towards him expectantly.

The pavement outside was crowded with people from a local cinema. Only then, as I mixed with them and felt the physical pressure of friendly bodies about me, did I become aware of the emptiness in my stomach. My knees were trembling with fear.

The street was plunged in darkness; snowflakes drifted against my face. I was overcome by a sense of devastating loneliness and I knew that, crazy as it was, I must see my wife once more before I went underground.

By the time I reached home, I had pulled myself together. The front of the house was deserted, the snow on the pavement unmarked. Before long it would be churned by motor tyres and jack boots. I stayed in the flat just long enough to collect a few winter underclothes and repeat the instructions I had already given my wife, then I slipped out through the back garden and made for the river.

It was a cold, bleak night to be on the run, but at least I

knew that I could not run far. The first thing the Gestapo would do would be to alert all railway stations in and around Breslau and publish a description of me. I had, as a matter of fact, no intention of leaving the city, for that would have meant losing contact with the Resistance group. The problem was to find a hiding-place that had not already aroused Gestapo suspicions. And clearly I must somehow change my appearance.

The months that followed were a constant nightmare of suspense and frustration, alleviated only by the courage and kindness of the family who sheltered me and the friends who helped. By no means all of them were Communists. Many of the Communist members of our Resistance group could have learned much from them.

I soon learned that both Standke and Max had been arrested and, when I heard a few weeks later, that two of our men on the Yugoslav front had also been arrested, I knew that either Standke or Max must have talked before he died. No one can blame him for that. But the effect was to start a wave of defeatism in the Breslau Resistance group that only receded when the Nazi retreat and the Russian advance were general knowledge. That was the turning-point we had been waiting for. But for Müller, the Gestapo agent, and my momentary weakness as a leader, we would have wrought even more damage than we did.

My sole preoccupation, as soon as I had mastered the shattering fits of depression and anxiety that attacked me, was to rally our demoralized forces. Having found a fairly safe hideout, I then had to change my identity, if I was to venture outside. First of all, however, I wrote a letter to my wife, which was posted by a colleague in Posen and in which I produced a bitter account of an unhappy marriage based on diametrically opposed political views. By presenting her as a devoted Nazi, I hoped to reinforce the arguments I had told her to use and relieve her of the constant attentions of the Gestapo. It produced the desired effect, and at the same time seemed to have convinced the Gestapo that I really had managed to make my way to the Red Army.

An effective disguise proved much more ticklish. Then one day, after two months confined to the flat, a glance in the

mirror at my long hair gave me the answer. I decided to change my sex. The outward signs of womanhood were not difficult to acquire. If anything, I was on the slim side, but some old stockings and a brassiere provided quite a convincing bust. I shaved my legs and hoped that my manly biceps would pass muster under a regime which boasted of its athletic women. My feet, however, proved a real stumbling-block, for they are on the large side and no woman's shoe had yet been made, even in Nazi Germany, that would fit them. That meant that I could only go out after dark. My voice sounded unattractive but not unconvincing.

I decided to give my new disguise several trials, before I ventured to move about freely. The first, on my hostess's eleven-year old son, was a complete success. The second was even more convincing but not particularly pleasant. Early one evening, on one of my trial outings, I was accosted by a young S.S. man, who was presumably suffering from front-starvation and a somewhat gloomy dusk. Having no experience in such matters, I ignored him, which in the circumstances, was a fatal mistake. The next moment his arm was round my waist. I was torn between an instinctive revulsion and a mad desire to laugh. He must have thought me tantalisingly denure, for his advances became more persistent and I was compelled to ask him, in the most outraged tones I could muster, what the devil he thought he was up to.

It was a highly flattering yet extremely embarrassing situation, which could certainly not be resolved by either of us in a public thoroughfare. So, having made my protest, I allowed myself to be piloted towards a small square, where trees and bushes provided more than enough privacy. And, no sooner had we sat down on a secluded bench, than my whole flimsy disguise was in jeopardy. I did the only possible thing: I caught the young S.S. man with a straight uppercut on his exposed chin, gave him another with my left and hurried away. My artificial bosom was heaving with the unaccustomed exercise, but I must confess that I felt a thrill of satisfaction at having knocked out one of Adolf Hitler's élite soldiers. I could not have wished for a better début. There was, of course, always a possibility that

he would start a hue and cry, but that was unlikely. His pride would hardly allow him to admit that he had been knocked cold by a woman.

The supreme test came, however, when I decided to call on my parents, who had no knowledge of my whereabouts and probably even assumed that I was dead. For security reasons I had been unable to communicate with them since I went into hiding, but it was now October, 1944. The first Russian bombs had fallen on Breslau. The Gestapo could no longer devote their undivided attention to hunting down members of our Resistance group.

My mother opened the door and my heart turned over, when I saw her thin, haggard face. She did not recognize me. Even when she had invited me in and we were sitting in the familiar living-room, not a quiver of uncertainty passed across her face. My father, too, was polite and unsuspecting. The temptation to declare myself at once was almost irresistible, but my mother had always suffered from a weak heart and I wanted to avoid giving her a sudden shock. So I broke the news gradually that her son was alive and in Breslau. In fact, he was moving about fairly freely, disguised as a woman, and would probably visit her very soon. Then I saw suspicion creep into her eyes, a dawning recognition and suddenly the tears.

Within a week I gave way to their pleading and decided that there was no longer any great risk involved if I moved back into my own home. As the Nazis retreated, the air raids on Breslau increased; by the end of December, 1944, the city was being prepared for a siege. The Resistance group changed its tactics accordingly. So far, its work had consisted mainly of printing and distributing leaflets, in which the progress of the second front in the West and the Nazi retreat in the East were reported. But, when the Nazi authorities called on the population of Breslau to evacuate the town, the Resistance leaflets urged them to stay put, for evacuation would mean certain death from cold and starvation on the open roads. Thousands of them chose flight and perished, for the most part, in the frozen fields and ditches.

Yet the fate of those who remained behind was not much

better. Breslau was virtually in a state of siege for three months. Every day of these three months it was bombarded from the air and by the Russian heavy artillery. The entire population had gone underground into the cellars. The wounded were left to die; the living were being herded from one quarter to another by the S.S. to re-erect the barricades that the latest bombardment had demolished. And the Security Police, knowing that the Resistance movement was now more active than ever, combed through the cellars day and night. Yet pamphlets still appeared urging the population and the troops to abandon this hopeless struggle, and, wherever possible, the Resistance used such arms and ammunition as it had.

Towards the end of the siege, the Russians suggested to the German Army H.Q. in Breslau that a specific residential quarter should be declared neutral territory and that as many as possible of the civilian population should be concentrated there. The German Headquarters refused. The Resistance movement called for a public demonstration in protest and several hundred women collected in front of the Nazi headquarters, demanding acceptance of the Russian offer. Troops were brought up but refused to open fire. Home Guard troops also refused. Finally a Hitler Youth detachment appeared and fired a volley into the crowd. There were many casualties.

The Resistance group at once decided to retaliate by blowing up seven divisional headquarters and Party offices at a time when high-level conferences were known to be taking place. Half the Resistance volunteers lost their lives, but the losses on the other side were very much heavier.

The boldest coup of all, however, never materialized. An attack had been planned for May 8th on an S.S. unit of foreign volunteers to the west of the town, which would enable the Red Army to break through. On May 5th the Nazis capitulated. On May 6th the Russian troops marched into the vast graveyard that had once been the city of Breslau.

2

MAY 6TH, 1945, should have been the proudest and happiest day of my life.

For sixteen months, day and night, I had lived in Breslau as a wanted man. For sixteen months I had masqueraded as a woman in constant fear of falling again into the hands of the Gestapo, remembering the inhuman tortures to which they had subjected me and knowing that, if they caught me again, I would make doubly sure of keeping my mouth shut. For, since I had emerged from concentration camp, I had committed an even more heinous crime than that of simply being a Communist; I had formed and trained a partisan group. In the eyes of the Nazis I was a double traitor. In the eyes of many Germans who professed no sympathy with the Nazis I was also a traitor. But I myself had only one loyalty, to the cause of freedom, for which in the thirty-odd years of my life I had suffered more than most, and to the champions of freedom, the Red Army.

On that radiant May morning I had no doubts or illusions. Only an intoxicating vision of the future and . . . a hellish vision of the present.

For three months Breslau had been under siege. S.S. troops, having ordered the evacuation of the town as the Russian troops approached, fought for every street. 1,600 Soviet guns and wave upon wave of bombers reduced the town to rubble, brick by brick, stone by stone. Thousands of civilians were buried alive under the falling masonry; thousands of others managed to survive underground. Surely no city in Europe ever discovered so many cellars!

'Then came the day—May 5th—when the incessant, indescribable din died away. That was the most unreal moment of my life. At first I felt giddy with stillness. Then came the supreme irony! I missed that maniac din as an alcoholic misses his gin.

But that, too, passed. I was suddenly conscious of a new sound, the tramp of marching feet. The siege was over and the German troops were marching towards the outskirts of the town to surrender to the Red Army. They marched in unison, like the good soldiers they were, through a ruined smoking city that reeked of corpses.

I was roused from my first unbroken sleep for three months by the tremor of feet over my head. I emerged from the cellar and watched the tragic procession. But human tragedy can be vulgar, too.

"So much for our glorious victory," shouted one soldier.

"Quiet there! No talking in the ranks," came the voice of an officer.

And an unknown soldier answered:

"Shut your mouth before the Russians shut it for you."

When I awoke on the morning of the 6th, the marching, too, had stopped. I had forgotten that there could be such a silence. I clambered out into the sunlight. The ruins were deserted. I began to stumble down the street, picking my way through the wreckage, buoyed up by the feeling that the past lay in ruins about me and that, if I stumbled far enough, I would meet the future.

I met it on what had once been one of Breslau's proudest squares but was now like a ruined cemetery. A giant in the blue uniform of a Russian lieutenant was stalking alone through the masonry as stolidly as if he was on inspection.

What followed must have seemed to him, when the first instinct of danger had passed, like a pantomime. War coins its own vocabulary of love and hate, of friend and foe. But he had two vocabularies, that of the soldier to whom all Germans were beasts, and that of the Communist to whom some Germans might be brothers because the Kremlin had ordained it so. How often in the next eight years was I to meet with this unpredictable dual personality!

"Welcome, Comrade."

The Lieutenant stopped and raised his light machine-gun.
"Ya Germansky Kommunist."

I held out my hands as if they were handcuffed, and the machine-gun dropped slowly. The Lieutenant motioned to me to walk in front of him and we proceeded through the ruins till a Red Army patrol came in sight. The Major in charge spoke fluent German. I told him my name.

"We have been looking for you," he said. "We know all about the fight you and your comrades have been putting up in Breslau."

Any doubts the Lieutenant's look of cordiality had aroused in me vanished now. At last, after years of concentration camp and underground Resistance, I was free among friends.

The hours that followed seemed in themselves a sufficient reward for the long, bitter struggle. I was conducted to the Commandant, an elderly Colonel, whose uniform was thickly crusted with decorations. He greeted me warmly in halting German, gave orders for tables to be set up in the garden of the damaged house that was his temporary headquarters and, together with his staff, settled down to a feast of vodka, wine and food which drove everything else from my mind except a devouring hunger.

Innumerable toasts were drunk, everyone at the table took his turn at embracing me and finally the Colonel made a fiery speech in Russian, the general drift of which I only understood when he took the large Soviet Star from his cap and pinned it to my shirt.

Then the Colonel called upon me to tell my story, and for the best part of two hours, pausing only for an interpreter to translate into Russian, I described the sufferings of Germany's Socialists and Communists in the Nazi prisons and concentration camps. Some of the officers were in tears. Again, when I had finished, they all embraced me. They were like children. I was deeply moved.

When that impromptu party broke up, I was intoxicated not merely by the vodka I had drunk but by a profound sense of liberation. It was not to last long. At almost every street corner

as the Lieutenant conducted me to the Town Major's Office, we were stopped by Soviet sentries who were clearly intent on arresting me. The Lieutenant had to argue his way through, sometimes very heatedly. The relationship between officers and other ranks in the Red Army was something completely beyond my experience.

After what seemed an interminable time, I was finally presented to the Town Major. Unlike the Colonel or the Lieutenant, both front-line officers, the Major was dressed in an immaculate uniform and stank of Eau de Cologne. While he rapped out questions at the Lieutenant, he kept his grey eyes fixed coldly on my face. After about half an hour, the Lieutenant left and the Major gave some instruction or other to an orderly. So far his sole acknowledgement of my presence was that cold, unfriendly stare. I was growing anxious and impatient. It was now several hours since I had left my wife.

Then a Captain and an interpreter entered the room and the Captain, in broken German, asked me to tell the Major my full story. I went over the ground once more. The Major listened with impassive face but the Captain, I noticed, was deeply interested. I found myself instinctively addressing myself to him.

"Do you know the leading Nazis here?" asked the Major, when I had finished.

I shook my head. I had spent the last sixteen months underground. But I added with a wry smile that I knew all the leading Gestapo officials by sight.

The grim humour was lost on the Major.

"We shall confront you with one or two Nazi officials to see if you recognize them," he said curtly.

I was dismissed. A Soviet N.C.O. was detailed to conduct me home. I felt completely bewildered. My first two encounters with the Red Army had left me dazed. Which was the true Russian comrade, the one who embraced me or the one who treated me with a mixture of distrust and disdain?

I was still wrestling with the problem when I reached home. There I found myself confronted with a situation that even in my most nightmarish dreams I had not anticipated.

As I stepped into our cellar with my escort close behind me, my mother met me, white-faced and babbling with incoherent terror.

"Stop him, Robert. For the love of God, stop him."

I stared past her and saw something that froze the blood in my veins. A Russian major had pinioned my sister against the wall and was clawing at her clothes. I leapt on him and pulled him back. His breath reeked of vodka; he glared at me with the hypnotic intensity of a man mad with drink and lust. As he reached for his revolver, two shots sang out behind me and plaster rained down from the ceiling. Then my N.C.O. escort jumped past me and wrenches the revolver out of the major's hand. The major's face was red with fury but the N.C.O. snarled a few words in Russian and picked up his tommy gun.

My mother had buried her face in her hands and was weeping bitterly. I looked round for my wife but she was not there. I had a sudden appalling premonition of disaster.

"Where's Inge?" I demanded.

Haltingly, between sobs that shook her whole body, my mother explained what had happened. Two Russian soldiers had taken her out into the yard. When my father tried to stop them, he was forced to stand against the wall and watch.

I have often looked back upon that moment and tried, coolly and dispassionately, to analyse my emotions. There was the first paralysis of pure, undiluted horror, in which I was conscious of nothing. Then came the mounting waves of hate, a hate such as I had never felt for the Nazis, a hate without hope. The brutish instincts of two common Russian soldiers had brought the world crashing about my head, as no Nazi tortures nor the subtlest persuasion had ever done.

Blind with fury and despair, I managed to convey to my Russian escort that I wanted to return to the Town Major's Office. When we arrived, the Captain and the interpreter were still there. The words came tumbling out of my mouth:

"Comrade Major, while I was celebrating with Soviet officers the entry of the glorious Red Army into Breslau, two members of that army raped my wife. On my way here I saw

that my wife is not the only victim of your liberation. What have you to say?"

I realized from the look on the Major's face that I had been shouting. His high cheek-bones were flushed and his eyes were blazing with hatred:

"I am not in command of all the troops in Breslau," he said between clenched teeth. "But even if I were. . . ." For a moment words failed him. "What have the Germans to complain of? They are all Fascists, they must answer for what their soldiers did in our country." He paused again and seemed to be making an effort to bring his emotions under control. "As far as your family is concerned, we'll see to it that this doesn't happen again," he concluded sullenly.

I could only stare at him. So it was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth! The Red Army was no better than the Nazi Storm Troopers had been: the Russian Communists, to whom thousands like myself had looked up to for years as the pioneers of a new world, were in fact no different from the Gestapo! Rage and despair welled up in me again.

"Don't you realize what you stand for?" I shouted. "You can't behave like barbarians. You can't do it. There are 1,500 men in this town alone who have been risking their lives and the lives of their families every day for months and even years to help you in your fight against the Nazis. Have you any conception what that means? We were fighting against our own people. When the Soviet Union finally entered the war, we felt we had something tangible to fight for at last. The one thing that has kept us going for months now has been the knowledge that you were on your way to liberate us from the Nazis. And when you do arrive, what happens? Our women-folk are treated like prostitutes. Comrade Major, I appeal to you in the name of Marxism-Leninism, in the name of the workers of the world, to put a stop to this reign of terror in Breslau."

The Major's face was congested with blood; his eyes expressed an ungovernable fury.

"You dare to give me a lecture, you Nazi swine!" he spluttered. "You have the damned impertinence to criticize the Red Army! I suppose your German women are too good

for our Russian soldiers! All you bloody Germans are Nazis and you'll be treated as such. Get out of here before I have you arrested, you Fascist dog. You don't seem to realize I'm an officer of the G.P.U."

Devoted as I had been for the greater part of my adult life to the cause of Communism, I had never been naïve enough to imagine that every Russian must be a good Communist or even a Communist at all. But this madman was an officer in the Russian Secret Police!

I tore the Soviet Star from my shirt, where the Colonel had pinned it only a few hours before, and threw it on the floor.

"I've fought twelve years for an illusion, a mockery," I shouted. "Now I've finished."

The Major drew his revolver.

The Captain, who had taken no part in this violent interchange, leaped forward just in time to strike up the Major's arm, and the bullet whistled over my head into the door behind me. The two men began to shout at each other in Russian; twice the Captain reached for his revolver but withdrew his hand. Finally the Major stormed out of the room.

The Captain turned and seized me by the shoulders.

"Comrade, it was not wise to do what you did," he said, "but I understand. The Major is not a Communist. He is a Russian with all the weaknesses and prejudices that still exist in my country. You and I must talk."

My brain was still in a turmoil.

"But if the Major is an officer of the G.P.U.," I said, "surely he must be a Communist?"

The Captain gave a wry smile.

"It is one thing to be a member of the Communist Party and another to be a Communist. Come on"—he pressed me into a chair—"let's talk this whole thing over."

I stared at him helplessly.

"What can you possibly do to stop these dreadful things happening?"

I wished at that moment that I had been buried, like so many of my friends, under the ruins of the town. I saw the look of pity in the Captain's eyes and, strangely enough, it

gave me courage. Here at least was someone who did not bracket all Germans together as Nazis, someone, who had fought this war, as I had, for the ideals he believed in--and he gave the impression of being honest.

"There isn't much I can do," he admitted ruefully. "Part of my job—an important part—as Political Officer has been to instil in the troops hatred of the Germans. Without that hatred we would probably not have reached Breslau. You must try to understand that. Our men couldn't be expected to distinguish between Germans and Nazis. One doesn't win wars with tautological weapons of that kind. Besides, it *wasn't* just Nazis who burned our villages, raped our women and killed our children. And we would be mad to try and tell our men otherwise. This indiscriminate hatred and lust for revenge that our men feel is a progressive hatred; it has contributed to the victories of the Red Army."

I remembered the drunken Major tearing at my sister's clothes, visualized the scene between my wife and the two soldiers with my father standing powerless against the wall, and my gorge rose.

"I can understand hate," I said bitterly. "I've felt it myself. But never to the point of behaving like a beast. There's such a thing as elementary human morality."

The Captain leaned forward and laid one hand gently on my knee.

"What does morality mean?" he asked gently. "I know what you and I mean by it. But isn't it completely unrealistic to apply our definition to this war we are still fighting? The Nazis began this war in open violation of every recognized moral principle, to say nothing of the universally accepted international laws. The majority of the German people gave the Nazis their consent if not their active support and thereby assumed a burden of guilt such as no nation had ever assumed in history before. For they launched a war of unprecedented savagery, a war in which there was no quarter and no compromise. It was a war we could not hope to win unless we, too, were prepared to fight as the Nazis fought, with the same murderous hate, with the same ruthlessness. . . ."

He completed his sentence with an eloquent gesture of his hands, then smiled:

"You are one of us, Comrade Bialek," he added. "You began the fight against the Nazis long before we did. But you have always fought as an individual, retaining in your heart the humane instincts of the man. What you don't realize is that the Soviet Union is vast. We have only just begun our work. As Lenin said, it will take generations to fulfil. I can understand your anger and your despair, but what we are fighting for is bigger than that."

There was just enough truth in what he had said to make me hesitate before I replied. I was prepared to admit that I was allowing my own personal emotions to blind me to the wider, long-term issues. But I knew that, had I witnessed an assault on anyone else's sister or been told that someone else's wife had been raped, I would still have been horrified beyond words. For, quite apart from the instinctive revulsion that such an act must arouse in me, such acts of barbarism by the Red Army could not but have the most appalling political consequences.

"That's true," the Captain confessed, "and the political implications are clearly important. But one must not overestimate them. Human beings have short memories. Of course"—he added hurriedly—"wherever possible, breaches of discipline by our soldiers will be severely punished. But the war is not yet over. As soon as order has been established and the Soviet Union helps to establish a free Socialist Democracy in Germany, then you will see her in her true colours, whatever you may be suffering at this moment."

I rose to my feet. There seemed no point in continuing the discussion.

"I'll take you back myself," said the Captain. "But think over what I have said."

The sights that met our eyes as we walked back together through the rubble-strewn streets were a much more telling reply to the Captain than anything I could have said. Soldiers in various stages of drunkenness sat or lay in groups at almost every step, some in the gutter, completely unconscious. Barrels and bottles of beer and wine had been unearthed from the

cellars and stacked in the ruins. It was a scene of incredible debauchery.

"What has this got to do with hate?" I demanded bitterly.

The Captain's face was rigid; he walked with his eyes fixed sternly ahead.

"An excess of joy can be just as unpleasant as an excess of hate," he replied coldly.

I glanced at him and saw that he, too, was distressed and humiliated.

He left me at the cellar stairs, where he posted a sentry, and I went below, prepared for still further disasters. But nothing more had happened. A few drunken soldiers had made their way into the cellar but my mother had made the shrewd discovery that, if the average Russian had an insatiable weakness for liquor and women, he also had an astonishing love of children. Confronted with a small child he would almost smother it with maudlin affection and the most incongruous presents. This was only one of many strange discoveries I made that day on my first encounters with the Red Army.

I realized by now that what the Captain had said was in so far true that the brutal assault on my wife was now irreparable. It had left a wound that would probably never heal. But, now that the first shock had passed, I found myself remembering other things that young officer had said, and I began to appreciate with what cunning he had chosen his words. For I was now torn between loyalty to my wife and loyalty to the ideals I—and she—had so long fought for. Indeed, it was not merely loyalty to my wife that was involved but loyalty to certain canons of decency that were as much a part of me as my political beliefs.

I spent many long hours wrestling with myself, yet, when the problem finally resolved itself, the answer seemed incredibly simple. The fault was entirely mine. If I had not been living in a fool's paradise in which the word "Russian" was synonymous with the word "Communist", if I had been realistic enough to foresee that the Red Army, when it entered Breslau, would not be—could not be—an army of liberation but an army of retribution, then I would never have left my family unprotected and

walked out with all the naïve faith of an imbecile child to meet the Russians. And I knew that, where I had failed once, I could not fail again. There were enough responsible men in the Red Army, and there would be more behind it, who must regret as bitterly as I did the excesses of the ignorant soldiery.

THE following day a Russian soldier came to conduct me to the G.P.U. headquarters. The Major, the Captain and the interpreter were all waiting. I was confronted with a series of German civilian prisoners, none of whom I knew. The Major was angry.

"We were not concerned, Comrade Major," I pointed out, "with collecting the addresses of minor Nazi officials or with getting to know them. We were much too busy fighting."

The Major took it surprisingly well. I suspected that the Captain had been talking to him. He informed me that he was organizing a party the next day to celebrate Germany's capitulation and that he wanted me and my wife to come. I replied pointedly that I would be glad to attend. He urged me to ask my wife. There was a bitter taste in my mouth. I refused to commit myself.

In spite of the most violent protests on my part, my wife agreed. I had the wildest forebodings, which seemed confirmed when we arrived and I spoke to three women in the kitchen on the way upstairs and learned that all three of them were expected to remain there every night in case the Major should require them.

I rushed upstairs to the Captain's office and demanded to know if the Major's sexual orgies were also to be written off as legitimate outbursts of hate.

The Captain's face stiffened.

"The Major will answer for it," he promised, then added.

"But don't forget that this isn't quite so simple as you appear to think. The Major has a very fine war record."

"That's as may be," I retorted, "but I don't particularly feel like celebrating with him. Perhaps you could arrange to have us escorted home."

"I know how you feel, but please stay," pleaded the Captain. "If you don't appear, the Major will be furious and that will only make things worse all round. I will sit next to you and your wife the whole evening and I give you my word no harm will come to either of you."

I had no option but to agree. The Captain led the way into a large room in which a long table was laid for at least twenty-five people. The Major, who was already there, greeted us so cordially that I found myself wondering if this could be the same man who, only two days before, had been on the point of shooting me.

Twelve officers and N.C.O.s came in and sat down at the table. The Captain took a chair between me and my wife. Then something happened that took my breath away. The door opened again to admit eight of the German civilian prisoners, with whom I had been confronted the day before as Nazi officials. I was conscious of the Major's eyes fixed intently on my face. He must have noticed my bewilderment.

"Keep calm, whatever you do," the Captain warned me in an undertone. "It's pointless to get excited."

The eight men, who were accompanied by two Russian sentries, looked just as bewildered as I was.

"Sit down, gentlemen," said the interpreter, "you are the Major's guests."

As they sat down, I asked the Captain:

"Didn't the Major tell me yesterday that they are all senior Nazi officials?"

"They are," whispered the Captain, "but there's nothing I can do. He seems determined to compromise himself."

The Major got up at that point to propose a toast.

"The Nazi war of aggression is over. Hitler is dead and the Nazi Party is dead. But the peoples of the Soviet Union and

Germany are still alive. I ask you to drink to the new democratic Germany and the new friendship between the Soviet and German peoples."

I watched the Nazis while the Major was talking. Most of them were smiling. Two even looked towards me and raised their glasses. That was too much. I set my glass down untouched on the table.

The Major glared at me. Wasn't I prepared to drink to a new and happier Germany and to friendship with the great, peace-loving Soviet Union?

There was a moment of deathly stillness in the room. The Captain laid a warning hand on my knee but I was only too well aware of the danger. I could feel a pulse beating in the pit of my stomach. Had it not been for one of the Nazis, I would probably have drunk that toast and despised myself for the rest of my life. But he was looking across the table at me with such obvious glee that my blood boiled.

"I've seen too many men die at the hands of the Nazis," I said hoarsely. "I refuse to drink any toast with them except to their eternal damnation."

The Major looked as if he would have an apoplectic fit.

"These men are not Nazis now but my guests. Tomorrow they will be Nazis again. Tonight you'll drink with them."

There may have been some purpose or other behind this, but to me it merely seemed criminal madness. Either the Major was toying with the idea of using these men or he was deriving a perverted delight from watching them eat their last meal and drink their last drink on earth. Probably the latter. But, however that might be, I had had enough.

"I refuse. I demand to be escorted home. I cannot sit at the same table with these men."

The Major was clearly about to resort to violence again. The Captain intervened just in time. A long and vehement exchange followed in Russian, at the end of which the Major sank back sullenly into his chair.

I glanced at the Captain and saw that his face glistened with beads of perspiration but his eyes were hard and angry.

"There will be no toast," he muttered. "But I must ask you

to remain. The Major will not give you an escort and without one you and your wife will be picked up and arrested by the first patrol."

The hours that followed are among the most humiliating memories of my life. The Major went out of his way to be pleasant to his Nazi guests, plying them with caviare and vodka, till the room echoed with their drunken laughter. I was more and more convinced as the evening wore on that they were merely being fattened for the kill and that, if any of them realized it, they were drowning their fear in vodka. I never thought that I could feel pity for a Nazi but I began to feel something like pity for these men. But, when the Major began to sing and finally to dance, with the Nazis gleefully clapping in rhythm, I felt nothing but disgust.

I could see that the Captain was finding it hard to restrain himself from interfering but I could not resist the impulse to ask ironically:

"Is this another 'progressive contribution' to your victory?"

He said nothing. His eyes were fixed intently on the Major, who had collapsed, breathless, into his chair, and was staring at my wife. She reached across and touched my arm as if for protection but it was the Captain who reassured her.

"Don't worry. Nothing will happen. I'll see that you are both taken home."

The Major seemed to realize what was in the wind for he rose unsteadily to his feet.

I could see that the Nazis were revelling in the scene. I did not know whom I hated most at the moment, the Russian Major or the Nazis, from whom he had "liberated" us.

The Captain shouted a few words in Russian, then strode down and thrust the Major back into his chair, and motioned to us to leave the room.

The following day, when I received another summons to the G.P.U. headquarters, I obeyed with a new sense of resignation. My first flush of enthusiasm now seemed incredibly naive in retrospect.

I was kept waiting interminably in a small, outer office. The interpreter, a young Lieutenant, seemed keen to engage me in

an ideological discussion. Not until later did I realize that this was no casual conversation but a sort of general knowledge examination.

With us in the office was a Polish Communist, who had been deported to a forced labour camp in Breslau by the Nazis. He spoke fluent Russian.

About midday the young Lieutenant suddenly remarked that his unit was moving to fresh quarters in another part of the town. Would I accompany them?

Any form of action was welcome and I agreed. Soon the Pole and myself were proceeding with the entire Soviet unit, all on confiscated bicycles, towards the southern part of the town, where our objective proved to be a handsome villa in spacious grounds. It was then that the Lieutenant sprang his surprise and put that long, apparently casual conversation on the theory of Marxism in a new perspective.

"The Major has decided to take you back to Russia with him. Your knowledge of Marxism is quite good enough for you to be very useful as a teacher in the German P.o.W. camps."

I confess that, in other circumstances, the suggestion of a visit to Russia would have thrilled me. But even the little I had seen of the Major had inspired a profound mistrust and personal antipathy in me. Moreover, as I pointed out to the Lieutenant, the new Germany would need Communist-trained officials and I was still young enough to have ambitions. Still, I thought it wise to pretend a rather keener interest than I felt. I asked when we would be likely to leave and whether my wife and child would be allowed to come with me.

The answer was far from reassuring. We would leave in three days. My family would have to remain behind. That clinched the matter for me.

"I'd like to discuss it with my wife," I said cautiously.

The Lieutenant's reply was like a kick in the stomach.

"I have no authority to let you go home," he said, with a shrug. "You are to remain here till we leave."

I knew in a flash that this was the Major's doing and that, in all probability, he himself had no thought of returning to Russia. Blind rage seized me again.

"This is monstrous," I shouted. "You're treating me like a Nazi. I demand to see the Captain immediately."

He gave another shrug of his shoulders. To him an order was an order and one German like any other.

"That is not possible," he said dispassionately. "The Captain has been transferred."

It took me a full minute to realize what he had said, but, when the meaning of his words did finally dawn on me, a shudder of fear passed through my body. It had never crossed my mind that the Major might carry his resentment or suspicion or whatever he felt for me to such lengths. Yet now that I was confronted with the appalling reality, I knew that it was quite in keeping with his character.

Even in such an extremity the bitter thought flashed through my brain that this was the reward the Soviet Union offered her devoted servants abroad! But almost immediately I found myself searching frantically for some means of escape. I had been in tighter corners than this before and survived them.

I took my dilemma into the garden behind the villa, while the Lieutenant, confident that I had accepted the inevitable, got busy with quartering his troops. The Lieutenant's confidence was not unfounded. Even if I had succeeded in passing the sentries at the gate of the villa, I would not have covered more than ten yards. At every street corner were double patrols, whose duty it was to arrest every civilian, of whatever age or sex. But young men and women were particularly sought after. Escape was impossible.

I was already abandoning myself to despair when my Polish colleague joined me. He, it appeared, was in exactly the same plight, except that the Nazis had removed him from his home and the Russians had no intention of allowing him to return. The knowledge that we were both in the same boat gave me little comfort, yet somehow it made me feel a trifle hopeful. And his next words were even more encouraging:

"Our only chance is to try and escape en route. We must stick together, whatever happens. I talk fluent Russian and, as a Pole, I'm entitled to wear a special armband. You must watch for a suitable moment to escape."

I could not help laughing, half in relief, half in bitterness. Here we were, two tried and proven Communists, who had suffered unimaginable things at the hands of the Nazis, virtually prisoners of the Red Army!

The next three days we spent undisturbed, free to move at will about the villa and the grounds yet as securely imprisoned as if we were in chains. We made only one attempt to explore the adjacent buildings. All were in ruins. Each house had been the scene of bitter fighting and the grisly remains were still there, the swollen corpses of both Germans and Russians in every conceivable posture of death. The air was thick with the stench of decaying flesh.

We decided to sleep in the garden that first night but the smell of death and the cold together drove us indoors. We found an empty cellar and remained there for most of the three days, entering the villa only for our meals. The young Lieutenant now took us so much for granted that he seemed almost to have forgotten our existence.

The denouement came on the third morning. It was just as unexpected yet just as typical of the Russian methods as the beginning of the drama had been.

We both woke late. The sun was already shining on the garden outside and there was a peculiar poignancy in that warm yellow light upon the dead landscape. The stillness was uncanny.

The Pole looked at his watch. It was eight o'clock. There was no sound of movement from above. When we went upstairs, we found the villa completely deserted. But it was a shambles. The Lieutenant and his unit had obviously left in a hurry. Whether by oversight or by design, we had been left to our own devices.

We did not waste any time marvelling, this time with gratitude, at the unpredictability of the Russians. At any moment a new batch of Red Army soldiers might appear.

Once again the Russian temperament came to our aid. An astonishing number of Russian soldiers had the novel experience when they entered Germany, of seeing, for the first time in their lives such products of bourgeois civilization as water

closets, watches and bicycles. It was not uncommon to see a member of the Red Army with his entire forearm covered with stolen wrist-watches. The fact that all of them had stopped in no way lessened his pleasure. The bicycle, however, has a more fractious personality. When the Russian soldier lost his balance almost as soon as he had mounted, he would invariably lose his temper and kick the offending bicycle into a state of mechanical insensibility. The same performance was usually repeated until such time as the machine had been mastered. Breslau was littered with broken bicycles.

My Polish friend and I had no difficulty in piecing two together. A second Polish armband was then improvised for me and in the afternoon we set off for the centre of the town. Our hearts were in our mouths, but we had decided that we must try to bluff our way through. It meant pedalling furiously and, as we approached a Russian patrol-post, shouting something in Russian, without slackening pace.

Incredibly, it worked. In most cases, the Soviet patrols were clearly much too concerned about deciphering the mysterious Russian password that we flung at them to realize we were past till it was too late. One soldier, more quick-witted than the others, fired his rifle after us but even he had waited till we were practically out of range.

My family had given me up for lost, assuming that the Major had finally succeeded in shooting me. But there was no time for grief. During my absence, my wife had made an arrangement with a nearby Military Police post, so that whenever a drunken intruder appeared, one shout was enough to summon the M.P.s. Their method of dealing with the unwelcome guest was unorthodox but effective. They would stop at the cellar door, fire two volleys from their tommy guns into the ceiling and bellow something in Russian. The offender then emerged with his hands up and allowed himself to be marched off without protest. On only one or two occasions did the culprit attempt to put up any resistance or to escape. He was immediately shot.

Two days of such incidents, following immediately upon my purely fortuitous escape from deportation to Russia, left me

completely demoralized. I had had enough. The past was behind me, as dead and meaningless as the corpses that lay strewn about the ruined town. As for the future, it could take care of itself. In a matter of days the plans of a lifetime had been reduced to ashes.

4

WHEN a Sergeant of the Red Army appeared and enquired for Robert Bialek, I wondered what fresh trap was being laid for me. Even the announcement that the summons came this time from the Commandant of Breslau failed to impress me. But I had to go.

He was a young man, slightly built, with a lean, brown face. I noticed that he wore no medals. I also noticed, to my surprise, that he was only a First Lieutenant, who, as I later discovered, had many full Colonels acting under him and was immediately responsible to the area Commander, Major General Ivanoff. The Commandant's name was Ustinow.

He gave me a long searching look as I entered his office, then spoke in Russian. I waited with some trepidation for the interpreter to repeat it in German:

"I am reliably informed that you were an active anti-Nazi. I am appointing you Civilian Adviser to the Breslau Commandant's office. I expect you to obey all my instructions, without question. I will present you to Major General Ivanoff, who will confirm your appointment. Have you anything to say?"

It was like listening to a proclamation. The final question was purely rhetorical. Having been tossed to and fro like a piece of driftwood, I was now to be set up like a chessman and moved about at someone else's will. Had this come a week earlier, I would have accepted with a full heart and asked questions afterwards. But now I was bitter and disillusioned.

"Of course I am prepared to do anything I can to help restore some sort of order in the town," I replied. "But I

must make one thing clear from the start: I cannot carry out orders which I consider wrong or which I don't agree with."

When that had been translated into Russian, with what modification I do not know, the Commandant said:

"You can leave me to decide whether orders are right or not. Your sole concern will be to carry out the orders."

I could feel the blood mounting to my face.

"Then you must find someone else, Commandant. I've only just managed to get out of the clutches of the G.P.U., before they carried me off to Russia. That and other experiences I have had in the past week have convinced me that it would be madness for me to carry out any and every order, regardless of whether I think it right or not."

"What you have experienced in the past few days were wartime experiences which were more or less inevitable. I am here to restore peaceful conditions and I am calling upon you to help."

"I'm not refusing to help but. . . ."

The Commandant interrupted me sharply. Although I could not understand what he was saying, the new, commanding tone in his voice was unmistakable.

"You must keep a check on your tongue. A Soviet Commandant does not issue wrong or unjust orders. You will be presented to Major General Ivanoff this afternoon."

The interview was over.

Ivanoff was friendly but I made no attempt to raise further objections. I was beginning to recognize at sight the Russians who were open to reason or amenable to opposition.

A small flat had been placed at our disposal. When I returned from my talk with General Ivanoff, I found a notice fixed on either side of the main door. It was in Russian and was signed by the Commandant. It forbade any member of the Red Army to enter the building and, in particular, my flat. I was now, formally at least, under the protection of the Soviet Occupation Forces. What this meant in practice would presumably become clear within the next few days.

But I soon found it impossible to wait for events to shape

themselves. I felt an irresistible urge to set the pace, to take up that conversation where Ustinow had so peremptorily broken it off. So I sat down and composed a memorandum to the Soviet Commandant, in which I enumerated various measures which seemed to me urgently necessary, if any semblance of order was to be created in Breslau. Strict instructions should be given to officers and men of the Red Army that acts of violence or indecency against the civilian population would be severely punished. Immediate steps must be taken to stop the Red Army from confiscating and removing the city's food supplies; the people of Breslau were already faced with starvation. Furthermore, thousands of former inmates of Nazi concentration camps had been let loose upon the town and were carrying out indiscriminate pillage. I suggested that ex-members of anti-Nazi Resistance groups should be mobilized as security patrols for the protection of the population.

In my heart I must have known how the Commandant would react to such proposals. As others had reacted before him. But I was still nourishing a faint hope that one responsible Soviet officer would face up to reality, without prejudice, and would act quite dispassionately.

As the interpreter, a girl named Nora who had been a school-teacher in Leningrad and spoke fluent German, translated my memorandum, the Commandant's face grew darker and darker. I had resigned myself before the storm broke. "German swine. . . . Nazi crimes. . . . Just retribution. . . ." I felt very tired. Only towards the end of his tirade, when he ordered me to get out, was I conscious that I was a very much better Communist than this arrogant, ignorant soldier. I told him so and sat, in dejected silence, while my words were put into Russian.

Then came, not a fresh explosion of rage, but a deathly stillness. The Commandant remained completely motionless behind his desk, staring at the carpet. Nora, the interpreter, watched him with an anxious face, then, after a few moments, began to speak to him. I could not understand a word she was saying but there was no mistaking the note of appeal in her voice. Finally, after an exchange lasting several minutes, she turned and made the surprising statement:

"The Commandant wishes to apologize for his violent language. He would like you to come to his office this evening at eight o'clock. Your family are not to worry if you don't return home tonight. The Commandant wishes to have a long talk with you."

Was this just another trap? All the doubts and suspicions that came rushing in on me must have been reflected in my face, for Nora added:

"There's no need to worry. Nothing will happen to you."

I was by no means entirely reassured, however, and it was in a state of considerable anxiety that I reported at the Commandant's office that evening.

The three nights and days that followed are among the most memorable of my life. Except for brief periods of sleep, they were devoted entirely to a conversation between a German and a Russian, neither of whom spoke or understood the other's language. It was a triumph of endurance for the Leningrad school-mistress.

The Commandant began by giving me a detailed account of the war in Russia from the moment of the Nazi invasion. In these first hours of our long interview I came to understand many things which I might otherwise never have learned. The fact, for example, that Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union was generally regarded in Russia as the act of a madman. The workers and peasants of Germany would never fight against their brothers in Russia. A few white flags, a few broadcast appeals to the German troops would bring shoals of deserters. Only the men in the Kremlin realized the situation was critical.

"I was one of the dreamers," said Ustinow bitterly. "When I saw our political delegations with their miserable white flags mown down by German machine-guns, I knew better. But it took much longer for the truth to dawn on the mass of the Russian people. To them Germany meant Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Then it was brought home to them that Germany also meant mass-deportations, summary executions, the destruction of their whole life. You must remember that before you judge the behaviour of our men here too harshly."

He paused for a moment, overcome by emotion. Then he continued:

"My wife and three children were all murdered by the Nazis. That is why I was furious when you expected me to protect the German population of Breslau. And yet perhaps you are right, perhaps you are a better Communist than I. Now tell me your story."

Dawn was already breaking but I was barely conscious of the hours that had passed. I told the Commandant about the long years of underground struggle before the war, of the Gestapo tortures, of the concentration camps and of the many men and women who had died in pain and in silence. Finally, I described my first encounters with the Red Army. When I finished my story, the sun was streaming through the window. The Commandant sat for some time, his eyes closed, than he rose and kissed me on both cheeks.

"Now we shall have some breakfast."

When we met again in the late afternoon, the Commandant had obviously given a great deal of thought to our conversation so far. Whereas twenty-four hours before he had been uncompromising in his rage, he was now just as uncompromising in his repentance. He had come very near to having me shot. In giving way to his emotions, in allowing his personal sufferings at the hands of the Nazis to cloud his judgment he had been guilty of a grave crime. There was only one remedy: he must confess his sin.

I had never witnessed self-criticism in so crass a form and I did not take the Commandant too seriously. But confess he did to the senior Soviet Party Official in Breslau! Only to be told that he had, of course, sinned against the principles of Marxism-Leninism but that he should continue in his office of Commandant and should endeavour to profit by his error!

The effect upon the Commandant was instantaneous; he acquired a new lease of life. My suggestion that I should return home—I was sadly in need of sleep—was brushed aside. Measures to restore order in the city and to guarantee the population an adequate supply of food must be worked out immediately. I insisted, however, on a few hours' sleep.

When we resumed our discussion, I found all my previous suggestions and several fresh ones accepted with almost embarrassing alacrity: soup-kitchens at strategic points throughout the city, special centres for children up to fourteen years of age, assembly-points for refugees and, finally, rigorous penalties for looting, arson or rape, whatever the criminal's nationality. I was authorized to form special Security patrols, which would have the authorization to remain in the streets after curfew and to notify the Commandant's office of any crimes or misdemeanours.

Then, at last, I was allowed to go back to my flat, where I immediately set aside three of the eight rooms as offices and three more as a central provision store. I rounded up as many of my former underground combatants as possible, split them into groups of three and issued them with police whistles.

The effect of even such elementary counter-action was very soon apparent. At first the patrols took some hard knocks, but before long the sound of their shrill whistles was invariably followed by the stamp of running feet. The most common crime was arson. Soviet troops and refugees, in particular, seemed to derive a perverse delight out of setting fire to buildings and even to districts which had only been partially demolished. Night after night the dark sky over Breslau glowed with the flames of blazing buildings. It was not until we commandeered sufficient cars to motorize patrols that we succeeded in coping with this menace.

But the gravest threat of all was, of course, disease. Innumerable corpses were still lying about the streets and rotting under the ruins. The Commandant, who was now like a man possessed, issued an order that all able-bodied members of the population were to spend four hours a day clearing the streets and burying the dead. Special groups of civilians were formed to search empty houses and cellars for food of every description. Every inhabitant of the city could be sure of one meal a day at the soup-kitchens, but even for that meagre diet the food-supply was running dangerously low.

Breslau itself yielded very little in the way of hoarded food but we soon discovered that in many of the outlying villages

there were considerable stockpiles of potatoes and butter, which were in danger of going bad if they were not quickly consumed. But, when Ustinow tried to gain access to them, he met with unbending, and in some cases violent, opposition from the other Russian Commandants concerned. These food supplies were not within Ustinow's territory.

The Commandant of Breslau thereupon came to a decision which was both unorthodox and courageous. He supplied us with horses and carts, so that we could simply take what we wanted. It was all done at dead of night and we steered clear of towns. The chaotic conditions in the countryside helped us enormously. But, had we been caught, not only we but Ustinow would have paid dearly. The Commandant was always waiting at the city boundary to welcome the foraging party after each successful expedition.

It was during these nerve-racking excursions that I learned something more about the Red Army: a Russian Commandant had all the power of an absolute monarch in his district. His rank was immaterial. I have seen Russian other-ranks, acting on orders of their Commandant, a Lieutenant, arrest a full General because his papers were not in order. And I have heard many an N.C.O. bawling out a senior officer who had not shown sufficient respect for the Commandant's instructions. The Russian soldier recognizes only the officers of his own particular unit as his superiors.

This was brought home to me again by an incident in 1948, when I was Inspector-General of the People's Police in East Germany. The Soviet Military Administration had decided to hand over a number of military barracks in the Soviet Zone, among them a group of buildings in the town of Riesa in Saxony. I contacted the Commandant of Grossenhain, the province to which Riesa belonged, and asked his permission to inspect the barracks, which were still occupied by Russian troops. The Commandant, a Colonel, was extremely forthcoming. Not only should I see the barracks but he himself would take me over them. There was an unpleasant surprise in store for us.

When we arrived, we found the main entrance barred to us by a sentry with a submachine-gun. The Colonel produced his

papers but the sentry was completely unimpressed. He simply said, "Njet" (No) and remained firmly planted in our path. The Commandant protested heatedly that he was the senior officer in charge of all troops in the province. To which the sentry replied, unmoved, that, only if the Commandant had a permit from the Lieutenant on duty, could he enter the barracks. The Colonel tried to force his way past and had the sentry's gun shoved in his face. The Colonel mastered his fury and confessed defeat.

He would have to telephone, he admitted. A few moments later he returned with the necessary permit and the sentry, with a broad grin on his face, stood aside to let us pass.

When I first witnessed incidents of this kind, I regarded them as symptoms of a complete lack of discipline in the Red Army, but soon I realized that they arose, in fact, from a deep-seated fear of espionage and sabotage. The cell-formation, with its blind obedience and its rigorous security precautions, which has always been an integral part of the Communist movement, has been perpetuated in the countless units of the Red Army. It is a system, that, for all its advantages, does not allow for lightning decisions on a high level. It is designed to prevent emergencies, not to deal with them.

Had the Commandant of Breslau not taken the law into his own hands, a most unusual course for a Soviet officer to adopt towards his colleagues, the situation in the city would have been hopeless. Even with the additional supplies we had looted it was still critical. The day came when the entire food-supply for the city of Breslau was stored in three rooms of my flat. From morning till night thousands of starving people clamoured for bread outside our windows. My wife looked like a walking skeleton. I had frequent fits of giddiness and nausea. My deputy, Gerhard Heidenreich, who is today a member of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (S.E.D.), was on the point of collapse.

Finally the Commandant asked me if I was ill. I said I was hungry. He stared at me in bewilderment.

"Hungry? But why didn't you tell me your supply of food had run out."

"It's not my supply of food," I retorted. "It belongs to the people of Breslau. I draw the same rations as they do. The city's packed with people who are slowly dying on their feet."

He gave me a gentle smile.

"You're a dreamer, Robert. Do you really think your men found all the secret hoards of food in the city? Of course, they didn't. People are starving, of course. I know that. But not so many as you think. And, besides, I can't allow you to go under. From now on you and Heidenreich will lunch with me in my mess."

I told him I would rather not. Surely we had to set an example?

"Set an example!" exclaimed Ustinow with a short laugh. "What kind of example? An example of starvation? Not if I can help it. I'm giving you an order. You and Heidenreich will report in my mess at one o'clock today and every day thereafter while the emergency lasts."

I had no choice. But a few days later I discovered that the Commandant was a better psychologist than I. I took a few hours off to visit my mother for the first time since I had become attached to Ustinow's staff and was greeted at the door by a delicious smell of fried potatoes. When I walked into the kitchen, I could only gape, open-mouthed, at the full frying-pan on the stove.

"Where on earth did you get those potatoes?" I demanded.

"Cellars and back-gardens," said my mother laconically. Then, with a shrug of her shoulders, she added: "I don't know why you go short. Nobody else does, except the poor refugees, and we do what we can for them."

There was a certain amount of truth in what she said but the grim fact remained that most of the population of Breslau was suffering from malnutrition, especially the children, and a great many were dangerously near the starvation level.

Ustinow performed miracles. He gave me flour and milk from the military stores. Never enough but still better than nothing. Yet Ustinow could move me to tears of gratitude one moment and tears of despair the next.

His favourite sport was hunting for undesirables. He would

drive up in the middle of the night and rouse me out of bed with a roar from the street below:

"Robert, come down."

More often than not I had barely gone to sleep, exhausted. I could have wished him almost anywhere.

In his car sat always the same three officers from his staff and Nora, the interpreter. Behind was a convoy of soldiers on motorcycles, their submachine-guns slung over their shoulders. Bringing up the rear was a truck, which was usually full of Russian deserters and civilians of every nationality before the excursion was over.

My function on these trips was that of a guide. I knew the southern slum-district of Breslau like the palm of my hand, so I always jumped on the running-board of the Commandant's car and clung on for dear life while we roared through the dark silent city.

The convoy would stop at given points and we would disembark. Then began the sordid scramble through ruined cellars with their huddle of bodies, some more alive than dead. Now and then shots would ring out. Some poor wretch had taken fright and tried to run for it.

Wherever an obvious deserter or looter was caught, he was put up against the wall and shot. My protests always evoked the same reply:

"There is no other way to create order in this mad world. These men are dangerous criminals. And don't forget that, but for the Germans, many of them would still be decent, respectable citizens."

After a time I stopped protesting. Perhaps I should have tried to reason with Ustinow, to point out that he was being both illogical and un-Marxist, that the short-cut solution of the machine-gun could not be justified simply by invoking the evil spirits of dead Nazis, but I had neither the courage nor the patience. Besides, the Commandant could so easily have retorted that order *was* being established in the city.

I little thought, however, that within a few weeks Ustinow's summary executions would seem almost acts of mercy. The day came when the Poles moved in. Breslau was destined to

become a Polish city. I had no particular quarrel with the cession, whether temporary or permanent, of the territory behind the Oder-Neisse line to Poland, if it meant the beginning of a new era in German-Polish relations, but from the moment the first Polish police unit entered Breslau it was clear that a desire for retribution was even stronger in them than in the Russians.

Entire streets were forcibly evacuated. Men, women and children were routed out of their patched-up houses and cellars, often without even giving them time to collect their miserable belongings. Any civilian took his life in his hands every time he appeared in the open. When a Polish Military Police unit moved into the house opposite mine, I sensed that we were in for trouble. Several of our security patrols had already been shot at by the Poles.

One day, in my absence, the Polish captain in charge of the unit appeared in my office and announced his intention of taking over the building. When my deputy, Heidenreich, reported the incident to me, I told him to see Ustinow at once and inform him that I had gone to call on the Polish captain.

I was received with a storm of abuse and threats. I produced various papers signed by the Soviet Commandant but they were angrily brushed aside.

"Breslau is a Polish town and only the Poles give orders here. Now, get out."

It was a fantastic situation. A Polish officer had treated a Soviet officer's authority with anything but respect and clearly regarded me, a German Communist, as just another Nazi. But I was accustomed by now to such absurdities. I found myself wondering, as I walked through the streets, how Ustinow would react.

As Nora translated my account of the incident, I saw the blood rush to his face. He summoned his adjutant and barked out an order. Then, in his few words of German, he told me to stay.

Within quarter of an hour the Polish captain was marched in. His side-arms had been taken from him. He was pale and obviously in a state of terror. I must confess I felt not a twinge of sympathy for him.

Although I could not understand a word of the Commandant's angry outburst, I could guess what he was saying. And the Polish Captain's reply was made in a tone of embarrassing apology. I gathered subsequently from Nora that Ustinow placed the entire Polish unit under close arrest for eight days, by which time arrangements would be made for its removal.

But not all incidents ended so happily. The following day, my deputy, Heidenreich, disappeared. All German and Russian patrols were warned to look out for him, but three days passed without any news. Then, on the fourth day, he contacted my office. He was a pitiful sight. Gradually I pieced his story together.

Heidenreich, noticing two Russian soldiers disappear into the cellar of an abandoned building, followed them. They were nowhere to be seen, but a fire was already blazing which, if left alone, might spread to neighbouring houses. It was one of these senseless acts of destruction, which were all too common at that time and for which there seems no rational explanation.

Heidenreich was busy extinguishing the fire when the two soldiers returned and flung themselves on him. Despite his protests, they marched him off to the G.P.U. After a night in the cells he was brought before a G.P.U. Major and was informed of the charge the two soldiers had brought against him. It was a pure fiction that might cost him his life. He had been seen in S.S. uniform entering the house and had been caught in the act of setting the house on fire. By then he had changed into civilian clothes. Presumably he had burned his uniform.

Heidenreich made the mistake of smiling when he heard this fantastic story. The Major slapped his face very hard. But he was outdone in brutality by the female interpreter, who, when Heidenreich attempted to give a true account of what had happened, drove her clenched fist into his face and shouted:

"Speak when you're spoken to, you Nazi swine."

The grilling that followed was a depressing facsimile of what he had suffered at the hands of the Gestapo. For three days the same senseless question was flung at him with maddening regularity. What had he done with his S.S. uniform? After

three days and nights of third degree, with little or nothing to eat or drink, he was transferred to another cell which he knew to be the G.P.U. death cell. That, as it happened, was his salvation.

The cell was on ground level and he managed to pass a message to someone in the yard outside, which reached me just in time. I immediately contacted the Commandant and we drove together to the G.P.U. prison. Ustinow gave vent to his fury, but the G.P.U. Major merely shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, Comrade Commandant, all right," he retorted placatingly, "we'll set him free. In two days' time we would have shot him. What do you expect? The statements of two Russian soldiers are worth more to me than anything a German may say."

"But did Heidenreich not refer you to me?" demanded Ustinow.

The Major shrugged again.

"Of course. But, quite frankly, I was not interested. Don't forget, Comrade Commandant, that you are not Commandant in this prison."

I was by now hardened to this sort of situation but to Heidenreich it seemed like the last crowning madness. No sooner had we returned to my flat than he broke down. I had passed through a similar, though even graver, crisis and I found myself plying him with the arguments that had been put to me. I reasoned with him for three hours, during which I felt as if I was dispelling the last of my own still lingering doubts. The subsequent years had a different story to tell. Today, I am a refugee; Heidenreich is a member of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party and one of the key functionaries in the Soviet Zone of Germany.

THE situation in Breslau was gradually returning to normal. The pestilential smell of death was gone; we had succeeded in burying most of the exposed corpses. The incidence of rape and arson had dropped markedly. Only the food shortage remained acute.

Then, in the middle of June, 1945, came a dramatic change. The formation of the Soviet Military Administration under Marshall Zhukov was immediately followed by the constitution of a Polish administration for the city of Breslau. Polish civilian and military personnel arrived and took over the former Police Headquarters. Little more than a month after the armistice had been signed, the Oder-Neisse territories were handed over to the Poles.

The transfer had clearly been ordained from Moscow without any adequate preparations for handing over, much less for protecting the German population. In a matter of days all semblance of the order we had created in Breslau had disappeared. But the tension that grew up almost overnight was not between Poles and Germans but between Poles and Russians. Every day Polish and Soviet troops were engaged in shooting affrays. The Russians found themselves in the strange role of protecting the Germans as best they could against the ruthlessness of their wartime allies.

Barely a week had passed, when the Commandant made the gravity of the emergency clear to me.

"You Germans will have to leave Breslau. Silesia and the other territories up to the Neisse are to become part of Poland.

The authority of Soviet officers like myself has already been reduced. Much as I would like to, I cannot transport all the Germans in Breslau across the Neisse, but at least I can see to it that the leading anti-Nazis among you get out to Dresden."

He then outlined his plan. The men most likely to contribute to the reconstruction of Germany would set out, with their families, accompanied by a Soviet officer and five soldiers. As the total could not exceed two hundred, only those who had been active anti-Nazi underground fighters would be selected. This meant leaving many a stout and sincere Communist or Social-Democrat behind, but that was unavoidable. There was much heart-searching and heart-burning, but the facts were plain enough, if not always pleasant: resolute spirits were needed in Breslau to stand up to the new Polish administration, while trained recruits were also urgently needed in the Soviet-occupied Zone of Germany.

The trek began early on the morning of July 6th, 1945. The Commandant presented us with a cart and horse, my sole means of transport, and handed me, as the leader of the "expedition", a sheaf of safe-conduct papers in Polish and Russian. I was sceptical of their value, knowing from experience how completely uncoordinated were the powers of the various Soviet Commandants. I could only hope that the new Soviet Military Administration in Berlin had begun to make itself felt.

As the Commandant embraced me warmly, I could not help remembering my first stormy interview with him. But all such thoughts were quickly driven from my mind, as we set off on our 150-mile trek to Dresden.

I very soon realized that, although there were only 190 of us, including children, it would be quite impossible for me to retain sole leadership. Hardly had we left the city before the company was spread over more than a mile of road. We were carrying much more luggage than had been provided for. A few had brought horses, but for the most part they were hand-drawn trolleys piled high with linen, clothes, kitchen utensils and even furniture. All the detailed rules and regulations we had laid down with a view to keeping the people together looked like becoming a mockery, unless firm and speedy action was taken.

At our first night-stop, about fifteen miles out of Breslau, I co-opted Heidenreich and two others to a committee and told them that, unless we created some sort of order from the start, we would never reach Dresden. Quite apart from the fact that the goods and chattels we were carrying must slow up our progress enormously, it was impossible for the Soviet guard—one First Lieutenant and five men—to protect us if we became scattered. The countryside was riddled with marauders of every description, Soviet and Polish deserters, roving bands of German soldiers who had not yet been rounded up, and, by no means the least dangerous, regular Soviet units who would treat the Breslau Commandant's safe-conduct papers with scant respect.

Thanks to the alarming picture we painted, our companions agreed to abandon all but the most essential baggage and to place all vehicles at the disposal of the Committee, to be used as they thought best.

We started off on our second day's trek in much better order and, as it happened, ran into our first crisis. In the middle of the forenoon a group of Russian cavalry opened fire on us and a running battle followed, in which three members of our Soviet guard were killed. The assailants withdrew, leaving four dead behind them, but they had taken prisoner the remainder of our guard, including the Soviet Lieutenant, and Hartmann, a member of the Committee. Our position seemed hopeless. We had taken cover on both sides of the road but were constantly under fire from the enemy, who were armed with light machine-guns against our remaining three revolvers.

Remembering that one of our men spoke fluent Czech, I asked him if he would try to get back to Breslau and summon help from the Commandant. Knowledge of an Eastern European language might make all the difference between success and failure. He agreed. I found him a reasonably fresh horse, gave him one of our three pistols and watched him move warily along the roadside under the shelter of the trees until he felt it safe to mount and gallop back towards the city. It was a forlorn hope, but it was our only one. With luck, help should reach us in about two hours. A cautious reconnoitre by some of my

men seemed to indicate that the main body of the assailants had retired, leaving only outposts to keep us immobilized. If for some reason or other they gave us a couple of hours' respite and if our courier succeeded in getting through to the Commandant, then we were saved. Otherwise. . . .

The miracle happened. Within the two hours I had estimated I suddenly heard a salvo of shots and saw the Commandant's requisitioned Opel racing down the road towards us. Ustinow was accompanied by three officers, each of them bristling with revolver, submachine-gun and hand-grenades. Two of the opposing outposts were riddled with bullets, the remainder came running out with their hands in the air. In the meantime Red Army soldiers were combing the neighbouring fields and woods, and before long two prisoners were brought in, both in Red Army uniform.

The interrogation that followed had unexpected results. Our assailants were former members of General Vlassov's White Russian Army, who, with the retreat and disintegration of the S.S.-Company to which they were attached, had acquired Red Army uniforms and taken over a large farm in the neighbourhood. But for their attack on our convoy, they might have escaped detection almost indefinitely. As it was, they were rounded up and shot.

Hartmann, together with the Soviet Lieutenant and his two men, was rescued, unscathed, but the Lieutenant was sent back to Breslau in disgrace and replaced by a Captain.

The trek continued, without serious incident, till we crossed the new Polish border, the river Neisse, and stopped in the town of Görlitz, where we found quarters in the town prison. It was here that the second crisis occurred.

As most of us were utterly exhausted, it was agreed that we should spend three days in Görlitz to recover our strength for the second lap of the journey to Dresden. Early on the first morning I was awakened by shouts and groans in the courtyard outside. The sight that met my eyes from the window made my blood boil with rage. A civilian with a red armband was putting a group of newly-arrested Nazis through their paces. It was not pretty to watch, neither the terror and exhaustion on the

faces of the victims, some of them elderly men, nor the expression of animal enjoyment on the face of my "comrade". My nerves were still frayed from lack of sleep and I could not control myself.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" I roared. "It's bastards like you that will make a laughing-stock of the Party. Take off that armband!"

I little realized what a hornets' nest I was stirring up! Not in the courtyard below, but immediately around me!

"Let him be, Robert! Why should you worry?"

"Why are you sticking up for a crowd of bloody Nazis? They didn't stick up for you, did they?"

"It's about time they had a taste of their own medicine."

They were all round me by now, some merely remonstrating, others almost threatening. I knew that there were many of my comrades who believed as I did, that to preach and practice retribution was merely to place ourselves on the same level as the Nazis themselves, but they had faded into the background. I felt a bitter taste in my mouth. I was just on the point of turning away, defeated, when the most outspoken of the rebels, a burly, vicious-looking character who had been something of a trouble-maker from the start, thrust himself forward and accused me of being a Nazi myself.

Mad with rage, I pulled out my revolver. Had it not been for the pathetic look of fear on his face, I think I would have shot him. But I threw my revolver on the ground in sudden disgust and walked out. I told the other three members of the Committee that they would have to set up a special tribunal to consider the incident, then I returned to bed.

When I recovered consciousness twenty hours later, after a fever that was largely due to sheer physical exhaustion, I learned that the tribunal had met and reached a verdict. My loud-mouthed accuser had been told to make his own way to Dresden; I was no longer a member of the Committee. I found the verdict both just and salutary. On the second lap of our journey breaches of discipline were few and far between. And I had learned—I hoped—to control my temper.

Four days after we reached Dresden and moved into our

primitive quarters in an army barracks, I was summoned with the three members of the Committee to the District Headquarters of the Communist Party in Saxony. We were received by Hermann Matern and Fritz Grosse, both now members of the Central Committee of the S.E.D. Matern, with his shock of silver-grey hair and his deeply-lined face, was an impressive figure. Grosse looked like an undernourished urchin beside him; he had been released only a week before from the concentration camp at Mauthausen, after spending eleven years in Nazi prisons and concentration camps.

Matern explained the position: Dresden was grossly over-populated. Only a small percentage of the 190 from Breslau would be allowed to stay; the remainder must move on to Thuringia. Then he added:

"Remember, comrades, that we are faced with an extremely complex political problem. You can forget all about Socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat for the time being. Our first objective in Germany is to bring the bourgeois revolution of 1848 to an end. No more. Only when we have done that can we start on bigger things."

There was an undercurrent of grim warning in his voice, as he concluded:

"Some of you may find this hard to understand, but the sooner you do understand it, the better. I wouldn't want you to make any mistakes."

I wondered if it was I or the Party that had gone mad. What in heaven's name could he mean by "bringing the bourgeois revolution of 1848 to an end"? Had we defeated Fascism merely to go back a hundred years? I asked Matern to explain exactly what he meant.

"It means we shall break the trusts and the combines," he replied. "It means that we shall expropriate the big land-owners. It means that we shall tear out the roots of German imperialism. But the difference between our revolution and the proletarian revolution is this: we're not going to abolish private ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of one class by another. Our programme will be carried through with the support of the liberal bourgeoisie, in short, with the

help of the reconstituted bourgeois parties. We must pursue a policy of collaboration with the other parties. We have no choice. The Nazi system was overthrown by force but not by the force of a proletarian revolution. The German worker's class consciousness has never been highly developed. Twelve years of Nazi dictatorship weakened it still further. We have to start at the beginning again, gradually building it up. You have probably heard nothing of the new Party line in Breslau, but there it is."

I went away with grave misgivings, but both Matern and Grosse were men of vastly greater experience in Party ideology than I. Moreover, Communist Party discipline is such that acceptance of orders from above is almost instinctive. And the Party saw to it that I had no time or energy for private reflection.

A few days after our first meeting, Matern gave me my first major assignment: to establish the first Youth Groups in Saxony. Officially, the purpose of these groups was to mobilize the young people for the hundred and one jobs that had to be done in a devastated city. Dresden had escaped air raids until virtually the last few days of the war, when the British and Americans, in support of the Russian advance (a fact the Russians have since persistently denied) wrought terrible havoc with their heavy bombers. But while the clearing of rubble was the ostensible reason for organizing Youth Groups, the real objective was the gradual foundation of a movement that would embrace the entire youth of the Land of Saxony and, subsequently of the Soviet Zone.

Neither the Party nor the young people could give me much support. Matern and Grosse merely shrugged their shoulders when I asked them what exactly I was supposed to do. And when I questioned the youth of Dresden, I was given a dusty answer. Dance-halls and brothels had sprung up overnight like toadstools. After twelve years of Hitler, the very mention of a Youth Organization seemed like a joke in the worst taste. Besides, the world was in a state of chaos; the past was dead; the future could look after itself. Young and old alike still had the smell of death in their nostrils.

I made a quick tour of Saxony and found the same apathy

and mistrust wherever I went. I picked a reliable member of the Party in each district to act as Youth Secretary but I realized that was an empty gesture. Not till I had returned to Dresden did I remember Matern's "Party line". Then I saw that there was only one way to solve this apparently insuperable problem. Matern was right: the Communist Party by itself had no appeal. Only with the co-operation of the other, non-Communist, parties and organizations could it hope to succeed.

After full consultation with the Party leaders, I summoned the newly-appointed Youth Secretaries from the various districts of Saxony to a meeting in Dresden. There I outlined the problem confronting us and then the solution I had worked out. As this was the first practical example of Communist "co-existence" policy in the Soviet Zone, which was subsequently extended to cover every sphere of activity, I shall reproduce in detail the instructions issued on that occasion:

1. In every district anti-Fascist Youth Groups must be formed by the end of October; in the first instance they will be district organizations attached to the town or district councils;
2. The leaders of these Youth Groups must, wherever possible, be members of the Communist Party; where this is not practicable, only members of the Social Democratic Party will be accepted;
3. The Youth Groups must be so constituted that Communists and Social Democrats form a small majority;
4. Representatives of all parties, confessions and trades unions must be included in the groups;
5. All provincial Committees and Town or City Mayors are to be informed that they can only confirm appointments to leading positions in the Youth Groups, which have been approved by the relevant Youth Secretaries of the Communist Party;
6. Each Communist Youth Secretary must also be a member of the appropriate Youth Group but he must in no circumstances accept office as an official leader;
7. Youth Secretaries must take the initiative in forming Youth Groups, for, by so doing, they will establish the moral

justification for electing a representative of the Communist Party to the post of Provincial Youth Leader.

These seven categorical imperatives were designed to overcome two major obstacles: the Soviet Military Administration, without which we had no *raison d'être*, and the non-Communist bodies, political and religious, without which we could not hope to succeed. Of the two the Soviet authorities proved the more difficult.

It was in the nature of things that Marshal Zhukov and his administrators should refuse to sanction any organization that was not under the official aegis of the Communist Party. Even the non-Communists, for the most part at least, accepted that. But the Russians had another, much more awkward, condition to make.

When I submitted the names of the first Youth Groups we had formed to Captain Jerochim, the Soviet officer responsible for Youth Questions, he pointed out that the names of several former members of the Hitler Youth were included.

That was hardly surprising, as about 95 per cent of young people in Germany had been either voluntary or compulsory members of the Hitler Youth. It was virtually impossible to start any kind of new youth movement that did not include them. Captain Jerochim was only concerned with his orders: a youth organization was to be formed from which all ex-members of the Hitler Youth were to be excluded.

I told Jerochim in no uncertain terms that what he was proposing was to form a Youth Organization of cripples and mental defectives. He started to shout the usual threats and, knowing the Russian technique, I walked out of Jerochim's office into that of Colonel Watkin, head of the Political Branch of the Soviet Military Administration in Saxony. He listened to my account of the Jerochim interview and promised to put my case to Berlin.

Twenty-four hours later I was summoned to Jerochim's office, where he informed me, without any suggestion of rancour, that my view had been accepted, but on condition that former Hitler Youth leaders were excluded.

So far, so good. I should, perhaps, have been satisfied with

this concession. At least the formation of Youth Groups on a substantial scale was now a feasible hypothesis. I had no doubt, knowing the German mind, that non-Communist political leaders and representatives of the various churches could be induced to collaborate. But I also knew how diabolically ingenious the Nazi leader-principle had been. We might ostracize the former leaders of the Hitler Youth Movement but we could not eradicate, even by order of Marshal Zhukov, the authority these leaders had wielded. The Allied bombers had reduced Dresden and many other German cities to rubble but the Nazi discipline and the instinctive obedience beneath it had not been destroyed. Unless we, the Communists, could divert it into our own channels, all our bright hopes of building a new Germany would prove futile.

I had only to remember the incident in the prison at Görlitz to realize that the mere suggestion of treating Hitler Youth functionaries as anything but criminals would meet with violent opposition not only from the Russians but also from my own comrades. So, before I took it up with the Party, I spent several days turning the problem over in my own mind.

Although I was unaware of it at the time, this was the first of my personal conflicts with the Marxist-Leninist view of society. I was a product of the proletariat, in the strictest sense of the word. From the moment I was born, I had known poverty and unemployment; I was weaned on the sour milk of insecurity; my first lesson was in the struggle for survival. Then, when I had battled my way into a trade, I found myself fighting against the jack-booted tyranny of the Nazis. I took to Communism as a Crusader took to his Cross. I did not believe in God but I believed in a better life.

Hitler had not given me much leisure time in which to work out in detail just what shape that better life would take, but one thing I had acquired throughout the years, in or out of prison: a profound conviction that no human society could endure unless it was founded on individual merit. I had come to hate and despise privilege; by the same token I loathed discrimination. I knew, of course, that Marxism foresaw the dictatorship of the proletariat over their enemy, the bourgeoisie,

but that was a triumph of the majority over the minority and it had never occurred to me that such a triumph could be achieved by brute force. The October revolution in Russia had been almost bloodless, certainly by comparison with the Nazi revolution of 1933 in Germany with its systematic extermination of millions of innocent people.

I had no illusions about the part the German people had played in that extermination, a passive but nonetheless responsible part. The guilt was not a bourgeois capitalist guilt, it was not a class guilt, it was a national guilt. Labels were iniquitous. And, from a purely practical point of view, they were dangerous. If we chose to brand all senior Nazi functionaries, whether in the Hitler Youth or in other organizations, as criminals, we would merely create an embittered opposition that would stop at nothing. Remembering my own experience, I knew I was right. If the Nazis had used persuasion and rational argument instead of torture, I would almost certainly have joined them. And so would thousands of others who suffered untold agonies and death with only their own martyrdom to give them strength.

I knew, however, that, when I did approach the Communist Party Leaders in Dresden, I would be regarded as a raving madman. I was. I suggested that local Youth Secretaries should be instructed to contact former functionaries of the Hitler Youth and invite them to take part in a free discussion.

"You must be crazy," said Grosse. "How do you know they won't blow us all up? We've got much more important things to do. Out of the question."

It was Matern who came to my rescue.

"You know, comrades, I'm not so sure we ought to say 'No' just like that. What I would suggest is that, as Robert is going to Berlin in a day or two, he should go and see Wilhelm and discuss it with him."

6

WILHELM PIECK, the Chairman of the German Communist Party, who was subsequently to become first President of the new German Democratic Republic, belonged to that select group who had spent most, or even all, of the war years in the Soviet Union. If I could get Wilhelm's approval, then my worries were over.

I travelled to Berlin in the beginning of October and met the man who was to be the first President of the Free German Youth (F.D.J.). At that time he was still a minor functionary with a strong inferiority complex, which he has since managed to conceal behind a show of arrogance and a particularly loud voice. But in 1945 he went out of his way to appear friendly and even modest. It was Honnecker who introduced me to Pieck.

Pieck was busy writing a radio script when I entered his office and he greeted me without looking up. For about ten minutes he continued writing, his enormous shoulders bowed over the desk, his broad, impassive face quite motionless. He gave me an impression of unwieldiness. Then, finally, he looked up and I found myself almost hypnotized by the startling blue of his eyes. Yet it is a peculiarity of President Wilhelm Pieck that he avoids looking anyone else in the eye. During the whole of our two hours' discussion—and I noticed the same evasiveness on subsequent occasions—his eyes fixed themselves on every corner of the room but seldom on my face.

Pieck's reaction to my plan was encouraging but non-committal. He was impressed by its boldness and, still more, by the possibilities that would present themselves if it succeeded,

but he made it clear that I would only have his official approval if I was successful. Today Pieck is a mere figure-head; decisions are made by the Politbüro of the S.E.D. and by its General Secretary, Walter Ulbricht. But at that time the Communist Party was still angling for power and its Chairman could afford to encourage individual initiative, so long as it succeeded.

As I expected, the Party Committee in Dresden now agreed to my project. But, having cleared that hurdle, I began to realize what I had taken on. I knew that, whatever irreparable damage the war had done to Germany and to the Nazi leaders, there were still thousands of young people whose faith in Hitler's Thousand Year Reich was unshaken. They believed that the Western Powers, and particularly England, had made the fatal mistake of not allying themselves with Hitler against the Communists and that they would pay dearly for their mistake. Germany's day would still come.

But, quite apart from the formidable task ahead of me, it had been made abundantly clear that, if I failed, I could not hope for any mercy at the hands of the Party. If I succeeded, on the other hand, my future prospects would be greatly enhanced. It was entirely up to me.

My first encounter with the "enemy" was in Dresden. Between 350 and 400 former leaders of the Hitler Youth Movement, both male and female, responded to my invitation: a heartening beginning. But, as soon as I entered the hall, I was left in no doubt why the response had been so encouraging. I was greeted with a well-rehearsed outburst of hissing, which died down somewhat when the Communist Youth Secretary for Dresden, Ament, who is now a senior functionary in the Central Committee of the S.E.D., rose to open the proceedings. But my first words were completely drowned. This was clearly intended to be a mass-demonstration.

For a moment the wave of hostility from that crowded hall threatened to engulf me. But almost immediately a sense of defeat gave way to a fit of blind rage. This was one occasion when my short temper stood me in good stead.

For a full ten minutes I roared and bellowed my anger and scorn. I accused them of cowardice in refusing to hear any

point of view but their own and of lack of patriotic spirit in failing to lend a hand with clearing away the debris in the city. Their inordinate vanity as one-time leaders was hurt. Before I had concluded my tirade, a sullen silence had fallen on the hall. But when I ended with the announcement that, as far as I was concerned, the meeting was over, I could sense their perplexity. The last thing they had expected was to be attacked and then dismissed.

I had barely sat down when an eighteen-year old youth in the front row got up and addressed his comrades in the familiar staccato tones that had become a hallmark of every Nazi functionary. Hitler had created the style and every lesser official in the Reich had adopted it.

Despite the sergeant-major's voice, however, it was a confession of defeat. This young acolyte of Adolf Hitler had been touched on the raw. He and his comrades were not afraid to listen to me! And after ten minutes of talking on my part, in which I was careful to avoid any mention of party politics, the same young man rose to announce (without consulting his comrades!) that all of them would take part in the work of clearing Dresden's streets.

I left the hall, flushed with victory and confident that, if they had surrendered on this issue, they could also be won over politically. It would be a long, tough job, of that I felt sure, but I had no doubt as to the final result. The fact that the eighteen-year old spokesman of the Hitler Youth leaders, Werner Tscheile, is today Head of the Department for Youth Questions in the office of the Deputy Premier, Walter Ulbricht, with the rank of State Secretary, and that Schmotz, another of the young men present at that meeting, rose to be second-in-command of the Free German Youth, that fact alone shows how right my instinct was.

The real battle began a week later, when eight of the Hitler Youth leaders came to my house for a frank discussion. It lasted until the early hours of the morning. My general line was perfectly clear. There was no question at that time of forming a Communist Youth Movement; the Communist Party was numerically much too weak to attempt such a thing.

Our aim was to win over the non-Communists not only among the youth but also in the political and religious spheres by convincing those who needed convincing that the Nazis had led them to disaster and that a completely fresh start had to be made. Those who needed most convincing were these young people whom the Nazi ideology had seized at the most impressionable age. But I felt confident that, if they had been open to the Nazi persuasion, they must also be open to ours.

At our second meeting, however, I received a rude shock. In the course of our discussion I was called to the telephone and went out to the hall to answer it. Quite an innocuous conversation followed, but my eye was caught suddenly by the gleam of metal under the lapel of one of the heavy coats belonging to my visitors; I turned the lapel and saw the badge of the secret Wehrwolf organization. My blood ran cold. The wearer of such a badge would receive short shrift at the hands of the Soviet authorities. I examined the other coats; every one of my visitors belonged to the Wehrwolf.

I was torn between despair and rage. It was my bounden duty to report these young men immediately and have them arrested. That would mean not merely the end of my particular project but the end of all attempts to win over any former leaders of the Hitler Youth. I was still completely convinced that it would be a calamity to make martyrs of them.

At the same time, the thought that their surrender had only been an apparent one and that they had made a fool of me was a shattering blow to my pride.

Pride triumphed. Although I knew the risk I was running, I decided to say nothing of my discovery to the Party.

A few days later I had an unexpected visitor: Nora, Ustinow's interpreter. She attended our discussion group that evening. She listened in complete silence. But, when the meeting was over and we were alone, she expressed the view that discussions of that kind were pointless and even dangerous.

Then came a long letter from Ustinow, in which he said, among other things:

"... You are casting pearls before swine. Germany needs a

Communist Party led by the workers. But do not forget that the German bourgeoisie has embroiled the world in two wars within our lifetime. And today, after it has brought untold suffering to Europe, this same bourgeoisie is still unrepentant. It is still waiting for another Führer to conquer the world . . ."

That was the last I heard of Ustinow. At a time when Moscow was trying to win over the German bourgeoisie to co-operate in building up a Communist State, such views as Ustinow held were clearly untimely, but whether that was the reason for his removal I have never been able to discover.

In any case, the issue, as far as my own particular experiment was concerned, was virtually settled before Ustinow's letter reached me. After our fifth discussion, Tscheile, who was still the acknowledged spokesman of the group, admitted that, as a result of our exhaustive conversations, their faith in the Nazi doctrines had been shattered. (I had already noticed that they no longer wore the Wehrwolf badges.) But what was to happen to them now? Were they to be left without a faith?

I could see that, having been stripped of their self-respect, they were wallowing in self-pity. I told them quite brutally that I was not in the least concerned to bolster up their ego as the Nazis had done. I warned them against plunging from one camp into the other. If they chose to attend our Communist Youth classes, they were free to do so, but they must criticize and ask questions. The Communist Party could only thrive on frank criticism.

I was doing no more than quote Party dogma and it was a dogma in which I firmly believed. Unfortunately, as I subsequently discovered to my own cost, the Party leaders did not believe in it.

At that time, however, I was flushed with success. Within two months I was personally responsible for recruiting over 150 Hitler Youth leaders into our organization. The ultimate effect was, of course, much greater, for thousands followed when the few gave the lead.

IN the middle of December, 1945, I was summoned to Berlin to discuss with Erich Honecker the final steps to be taken towards organizing the youth on a Zonal basis. Two other future Soviet Zone personalities were present, Paul Verner, today a leading member of the Central Committee, and Heinz Kessler, now Deputy to the East German Minister for Internal Affairs and a Lieutenant-General in charge of the People's Police (Air); both had just arrived from the Soviet Union.

Honecker asked for my views on the final shape of the Youth organization for East Germany. I had given the matter some thought and decided that, as a merger of the Social Democrat and Communist Parties was in the offing (it was finally announced on February 27th, 1946), I regarded a combined Social Democrat and Communist youth organization as logical.

Honecker at once shook his head. In the circumstances that was impossible. It was essential not merely to gain the co-operation of the centre and right-wing parties but to make it binding. Separate organizations run by the bourgeois parties and by the Churches could not be allowed. The only solution was a Youth Movement that embraced all parties and confessions and that, ostensibly, belonged to none.

I had no doubt the political parties could be induced to accept such a solution but I had grave misgivings about the Churches.

"We shall have to make considerable concessions in the beginning," Honecker admitted. "We have no desire to

start a quarrel with the Churches. And we'll have to move carefully. But, if we can win over one or two of the Church leaders, I think we can get them to suggest the sort of organisation we want."

I was not particularly reassured. I could foresee the young people being pulled in every conceivable direction, as each faction, political or religious, fought for their allegiance. But Honnecker had no such forebodings.

"Neither the bourgeois parties nor the Churches have got enough trained people. We have. At least we shall have. We've got to push ahead with the training of special personnel. And we must see to it that in every group the best of 'their' people are given senior jobs, where they can't do any damage. At the same time they won't be able to complain that we're trying to steal the best jobs. With one or two exceptions, we don't want them. We must put first-class people in down below, where it really matters."

That sounded like good sense to me. But it meant that we must press on with the training of youth functionaries. I suggested that a special training school should be opened immediately in Saxony with three-weeks' courses for young Party members and for other young people who sympathised with us. I could think of several former Hitler Youth leaders who would make excellent material.

Honnecker nodded his approval and seemed confident that he could get Soviet permission within a few days. As he pointed out, the Party was lamentably short of trained functionaries, and there was very little time left. The new Zonal Youth Organization must be under way before the merger of the Socialist and Communist Parties took place.

Its name was no problem. During the war exiled German and Austrian Communists had established active Youth Groups—there was one in London—under the title "Free German Youth" (F.D.J.). It seemed admirably suited to the sort of non-Party organization we had in mind. The question of uniforms could be left until later: the essential thing was, as Honnecker stressed, that Youth Groups all over the Zone, beginning with Saxony, should be encouraged to send in

requests to the Soviet Military Administration for a general youth organization embracing all political and religious affiliations. This "spontaneous" demand would place the bourgeois parties and the Church leaders in a very awkward situation. They could not afford to reject such a proposal, although they must realize that, in accepting it, they were dispensing with any need for separate political or confessional organizations. Besides, attempts by the bourgeois parties to form their own youth organizations had already been side-stepped by the Soviet authorities. At the same time nothing could be more "democratic" than the granting of such a universal demand by the Soviet authorities.

Honnecker had worked it out in considerable detail. Immediately on my return to Dresden I was to organize mass Youth Meetings throughout Saxony, at which only one other person was to speak apart from myself: Hermann Axen.

Axen had spent his whole life in the service of the Communist Party. His father was a Communist Party official in Leipzig, who was executed in a Nazi concentration camp. About the same time, young Axen, then eighteen, was condemned to three years' imprisonment for Communist Youth activities and was subsequently sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Five years later, when Hitler and Stalin signed their non-aggression pact in 1939, he was deported to Russia, where he underwent intensive political training and finally became a lecturer in politics. When I first met him, in 1945, he was only twenty-nine, but, as was to be expected, he rose rapidly. He had none of the stigma of exile in the West. He had spent the war years in Moscow in the select company of men like Pieck and Ulbricht, who were marked out by the Kremlin as the future rulers of Germany.

He was one of the co-founders of the "Free German Youth" and, together with myself and thirteen others, was a member of the first provisional Directorate. He continued until 1949 to be a member of the Secretariat, the ruling body, then was promoted to the Central Committee of the S.E.D., and today he is Second Secretary to the Berlin District Committee of the Party.

Honnecker clearly regarded Saxony as a test case. It combined an active Communist Party with an equally active bourgeois element, as did no other land in the Soviet occupation Zone. If we could bring off our coup in Saxony, then success was pretty well assured elsewhere.

I pointed out two dangers, however. Party officials outside Berlin, and especially in the smaller towns and villages, were extremely poorly paid. They received no more than half of what the average factory-worker earned, sometimes less, and yet they were expected to work day and night, all too often at the cost of breaking up their family lives. And the second danger was that the senior officials in Berlin would become too wrapped up in paper to realize just what they were demanding of their subordinates.

Honnecker took it surprisingly well. In fact he immediately revealed, with a grin, that, while he was to become head of the new organization, I had been proposed as the administrative head. I was flattered but loth to accept. I had never been happy on an office stool and I felt that the field-work in Saxony was only beginning.

Honnecker finally gave way and Hermann Axen's name immediately cropped up. He was subsequently appointed.

IMMEDIATELY on my return from Berlin I called a meeting of the district Youth leaders throughout Saxony. When they left Dresden, they had received the following instructions:

1. A series of mass-meetings were to be held in every district by the end of January. At each one a resolution must be adopted calling for the formation of a Zonal Youth organization.
2. All district Youth Groups must pass similar resolutions by January 20th. It was essential that representatives of all bourgeois parties and Churches should identify themselves with these resolutions. Should any obstacles arise, I was to be notified immediately.
3. In every large town either Axen or myself would address special demonstrations.

Both Axen and I were trained "agitators", to whom a crowd was a challenge. We spent the next fourteen days tearing round the countryside, talking ourselves hoarse. We had our reward: the resolutions were adopted practically without a dissentient voice. But our final triumph came when Honnecker informed us that the foundation-ceremony of the "Free German Youth" would take place in Dresden.

Honnecker had good reason to be pleased. The first of the special training courses for future F.D.J. officials had already been completed. I had selected a twenty-four-year old newspaperman to run it. Hans Gossens had been a fanatical Nazi, till he was captured on the Russian front and "converted" to Communism. He proved an admirable teacher. In

fact, his success was not without its embarrassment, for three members of the Liberal Democratic Party, after three weeks of the course, announced their intention of leaving the L.D.P. It was only with the greatest difficulty that we dissuaded them. The last thing we wanted at that time was to encourage defection from the bourgeois parties.

The foundation-ceremony was finally fixed for March 7th, 1946, and, as the proceedings were to be broadcast, I was warned that my speech must be scripted and submitted to the Soviet Military Administration. Phrases such as "Anglo-American Imperialism" were still taboo.

Despite the cold calculation that had gone to preparing that moment, it proved to be an impressive occasion. Some 3,000 young people packed the hall. I feel sure that to most of them this was the first step towards a new and healthier Germany. They had had enough of despair and disillusionment; they wanted hope and a new vision. I was sincerely convinced at that time that we, and we alone, could give it them. Subsequent events were to prove me wrong.

In March 1946, however, I was conscious only of the overwhelming success of our campaign in Saxony. When the Free German Youth movement held its first parliament at Whitsun, 1946, it had 85,000 members in the Soviet Zone; of these over 50,000 were in Saxony.

But one of our most serious obstacles from the beginning had been the G.P.U., today known as the N.K.W.D. I was deluged with appeals for help from parents, whose sons and daughters had been arrested by the Russian secret police. Finally, I decided to try to make contact with them.

It took weeks of lobbying before I finally reached the General in charge of the G.P.U. in Saxony. His headquarters was in a villa in a remote suburb of Dresden and he was, I gathered, only accessible after two in the morning.

He was a giant of a man, whose name I still do not know to this day. I told him, through an interpreter, why I had come. He replied that he could not possibly consider the hundreds of cases I had mentioned; all the young people arrested had

been guilty of belonging to the illegal Wehrwolf organization and of being engaged in sabotage work.

I protested that, while some were undoubtedly guilty, there were many who had attended our courses and who must be innocent.

The General seemed quite unperturbed by my insistence. He suggested that I should name a specific case. I did. I named a young man whose father was a Party member and who had done extremely well in his district Youth Group.

The General immediately got in touch with the district in question by telephone and I learned that the young man was in Dresden. Half an hour later he was there in the office.

The General motioned to me to ask questions. The conversation that followed was brief and painful:

"Do you feel you have been wrongfully arrested?" I demanded.

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"Depends what you mean."

"Were you a member of the Wehrwolf?"

"Of course I was."

"Did you try to blow up the Soviet Commandatura in Plauen?"

"Yes."

I was flabbergasted.

"But your father's an old Party member. He was in a concentration camp. How could you possibly . . . ?"

"My father was a traitor," said the young man curtly. "If it had not been for Communists like him, Germany would never have lost the war."

The look of contempt on this lad's face left no doubt in my mind that he meant every word he said. I had to accept defeat. But it was a shattering blow to my self-confidence. I thought back to the Hitler Youth leaders whom I had "converted" in my flat and wondered, with a sense of panic, how many of them were like this lad from Plauen, diabolically clever actors.

The General made no attempt to soften the blow. I could hardly blame him. He pointed out quite rightly that, while he

had every sympathy with parents who refused to believe the worst of their children, he found it difficult to accept from me, a senior Party official, the charge that he had been responsible for making indiscriminate arrests of innocent people. Of course mistakes were made but in most cases they were the fault not so much of his men as of the German informers.

I had good cause to remember his words a week later. He had dismissed me on a kindly note, urging me to come to him again, if I wanted help but to make sure next time that I did not act on pure impulse.

A week after that painful interview I had an urgent call from the District Headquarters in Kamenz, a town of some 40,000 inhabitants about an hour and a half's drive from Dresden. When I arrived, I found myself with a real crisis on my hands. Every single senior official of the District Youth Group had been arrested the day before by the G.P.U. The same had happened in the local branches. Between 85 and 100 key men had disappeared. The charge against them was the familiar one: membership of the secret Wehrwolf organization.

My heart sank. This seemed inconceivable, and yet I remembered with what confidence I had started to question the young man from Plauen and with what disastrous results. This time I must have something more substantial than a personal conviction. On the other hand, if all—or even most of—the leading officials of our Youth Movement in Kamenz had, in fact, been engaged in Nazi underground activities, that was the end of our new movement, not merely in this district but probably in the Zone as a whole. It would certainly put paid to my policy of winning over the Hitler Youth and therefore to my career. I was not going to accept that prospect without a fight. But I still needed some concrete fact to submit to the General.

I had it before many hours had passed and it was a not unfamiliar though none the less tragic fact. A seventeen-year old girl, one of those arrested, had been released, after the G.P.U. had sworn her to silence. But her condition was such when she arrived home that her brother forced the truth out of her. She had been raped by the Major in charge of the

investigation. All the nauseating evidence was there to prove it.

Acts of this kind had grown rarer as conditions became more settled but, for that very reason, they seemed now even more repellent than in the crazy atmosphere of war.

I gave orders for the girl to be kept in hiding, in case the G.P.U. might try to arrest her again, and set off for the District Commandant's office. My interview with him was brief and fruitless. He was an arrogant Lieutenant-Colonel, who simply refused to answer questions. I re-entered my car and drove straight to the General's villa in Dresden. He was asleep and none dared disturb him. I finally succeeded, however, in tracking down the interpreter and was so insistent that he agreed to wake the General.

When he appeared ten minutes later, I told him what had happened. He looked at me with narrowed eyes.

"If you're telling the truth, the Major will be shot. If not, I shall have you arrested."

I was quite prepared to take any consequences if I was proved wrong.

The General and several officers climbed into an enormous Horch and we set off for Kamenz. Our first call was at the Party Headquarters, where the girl, still on the verge of nervous breakdown, was induced to tell her story. I could see that the General was deeply impressed by it, for his face was set and his eyes were cold with anger, when she had finished.

We drove from there to the local prison, which was also the headquarters of the G.P.U. The General's arrival was completely unexpected. A heated conversation followed between him and the G.P.U. Major, at the end of which he suddenly stepped forward and ripped off the Major's epaulettes then placed him under arrest. I never heard of him again.

Within a few hours the General had a full explanation of the arrests and every one of our officials was released. But this incident threw a revealing light on conditions in the Soviet Zone at that time. A minor Nazi official, who was in prison in Kamenz, had offered the G.P.U. a long list of names of

Wehrwolf members in exchange for his freedom. The bargain was struck. But the list merely gave the names of every Youth official in the District. The G.P.U. neither attempted to contact our Party headquarters nor waited for any sort of confirmation before releasing the informer. The whole unfortunate incident showed how arbitrary were the powers of the Soviet secret police and how little confidence the Russians had in the German Communist Party.

DURING the latter half of 1945 and the early months of 1946, while I was fully engaged in organizing the new Youth Movement in Saxony, an extremely important political development had taken place. Although I was not myself directly involved in it, most of the leading figures were personally known to me and I was fully aware of what was happening.

To appreciate the significance of the merger between Socialists and Communists into one Party, the Socialist Unity Party or S.E.D., one must consider the part these parties had played under the Nazis. During the twelve years of Hitler's regime, these two parties, who had always been bitterly opposed to one another, adopted quite different tactics. The Social Democrats, being much less rigidly organized, broke up as a coherent Party very soon after Hitler came to power. Some of its members joined the Nazi Party and became its "left" wing, till they were purged or escaped abroad. Some abandoned politics altogether. Some emigrated at the very beginning. Some went underground. A few made common cause with the Communists. A united Socialist opposition to the Nazis did not exist.

The Communist Party, on the other hand, managed to survive, in spite of the tragic miscalculations of its leaders, as a result of which most of them were either arrested or executed or forced to flee the country. Only small, well-camouflaged cells remained and they could do little in the way of organized resistance. But I know from my own experience that these

Groups were thorns in the side of the Gestapo and that they managed to retain some sort of cohesion.

In one sphere, however, we were able to make ourselves felt: the concentration camps. There Communists, Socialists and Jews were thrown together as never before, with a common bond of suffering. They were all, irrespective of their political or religious beliefs, victims of Fascism, and this was an all-embracing title which proved extremely useful to the Communist Party in East Germany after the war. For, thanks to their Party training and to their numbers, the Communist inmates of the camps were able to gain the ascendancy while the war was still on.

The Social Democrat Party emerged from the war in an advanced state of disintegration; the Communists, on the other hand, thanks partly to the prestige they had gained by their underground activities in countries like France, had benefited rather than suffered as a Party from Nazi persecution.

By the end of 1945 the political stage in East Germany was occupied by four parties all of which existed in the Anglo-American Zones of occupation. The two "bourgeois" parties, the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Democrats, of which the Christian Democrats were the larger party, were both committed to the West. The Social Democrats, numerically the largest, were undecided. The Communists, though smaller in numbers than either the Social Democrats or the Christian Democrats, were by far the best organized. And they had, in principle at least, the great advantage of enjoying the confidence of the Russians, although in fact, as I have tried to explain, it took a considerable time before the Soviet authorities showed any real respect for their German comrades.

My personal recollection of the birth-pangs of the Socialist-Communist merger goes back, in particular, to two personalities who subsequently became—and still are—leading members of the Socialist Unity Party. One was Hermann Matern, whom the Communist Party had entrusted with the extremely difficult task of "marrying" the Socialists and the Communists in Saxony. The other personality was Otto Buchwitz, who

was then Chairman of the Social Democrat Party in Saxony.

Matern, who is today in his early sixties, has been a member of the German Communist Party ever since it was founded. Like so many of his colleagues in East Germany, he spent the war years in the Soviet Union, where he was actively engaged on the "conversion" of German PoWs. Since April 1946, when the merger took place which he did so much to bring about, he has been a member of the Party's Central Committee and, since 1950, a member of the all-powerful Politbüro.

Buchwitz, fourteen years older than Matern, has spent his entire adult life in the Social Democrat Party. In 1933 he fled to Denmark but the Nazi invasion in 1940 caught up with him and he spent the remainder of the war years in Nazi prisons. His reward for the post-war merger was a senior post in the Socialist Unity Party, which he still holds.

These, then, were the two men who negotiated and finally engineered one of the crucial political marriages of post-war Germany. From conversations I had with Matern I know that his job was not an easy one. Buchwitz was a chronic waverer. After several hours of discussion with the old man, Matern would leave, convinced that at last he had been won over. But next morning Buchwitz would fall foul of the right-wing element in his own party, who were opposed to the merger. Thanks to the widespread influence of Kurt Schumacher, the West German Socialist leader, the majority of the Social Democrats in Saxony belonged to this "right" wing. But the majority of the majority were not prepared to voice their opposition openly. Further, even among those who were prepared to voice their opposition, there were some who conceded that a merger might be acceptable if enough of the Social Democrat leaders were given senior positions in the new Party.

Matern was confident that, by exploiting these internal differences and, if necessary, making substantial concessions, he would succeed. For, as I remember him saying to me once:

"The only thing that matters to us is to have the Chairmanship of the Personnel and Administration Committees. As far as I am concerned, they can have all the other official posts. We have such a tremendous advantage in political training and experience in the Party as a whole that we can be quite sure of getting the new Party under our control in our own good time."

Matern's assessment of the situation was diabolical in its shrewdness. He knew that, at that early stage of the occupation, the Russians were not prepared to alienate the British and Americans by a too blatant support of the Communist Party. On the other hand, the disunity and widespread defeatism within the Social Democrat Party was a sufficient counter-weight. And the much more intensive political training of the rank-and-file Communist must inevitably tip the scales.

Matern was right. From every corner of Saxony apparently spontaneous resolutions began to pour in from local branches of the Communist and Social Democrat Parties calling upon their leaders to merge the two parties. The Socialist leaders were, however, so strongly opposed to a merger of the local branches that Matern stopped the campaign and decided to concentrate on the top layer. By mid-February 1946, he had persuaded Otto Buchwitz to agree to a meeting between the Socialist and Communist leaders, which I, together with fourteen other comrades, attended. The Socialists came in equal strength. Colonel Watkin, the officer in charge of the Political Branch of the Soviet Military Administration in Saxony, was also present with three other officers. It was a memorable and dramatic occasion.

Matern, who was in the chair, made an eloquent appeal for a united front in Saxony that would give the lead to other lands in the Soviet Zone. Buchwitz supported him. But the next speaker, the Deputy Chairman of the Social Democrat Party in Leipzig, threw the entire meeting into a turmoil by accusing Buchwitz of treachery and then turning on the Soviet authorities. He charged them with having used threats against any Social Democrat in the local branches who had the courage to oppose the merger.

When he sat down, there was a moment of deathly stillness in the room. Only the four Soviet officers seemed quite unconcerned. Then Matern, his face red with anger, made an impassioned speech in defence of the Red Army, which also became a defence of Buchwitz.

He was interrupted by another Social Democrat, who expressed regret at his colleague's lack of restraint but approval of his views. He too had knowledge of Soviet commandants threatening Social Democrats with reprisals if they did not toe the line. And he went on, in the same quiet tone, to reproach Buchwitz with having conducted his negotiations with Matern without consulting his colleagues, much less keeping the Party's headquarters in Berlin informed. A Socialist delegate from Leipzig spoke in similar terms.

At this point, Buchwitz, who suffered from a weak heart, clutched at his breast and stammered out a protest. His reply was significant: he had deliberately avoided consulting many of his colleagues because he did not wish the Berlin headquarters (which was naturally loyal to Schumacher), to receive any information before the Central Committee. (This Committee was the Party caucus for the Soviet Zone and was headed by Otto Grotewohl, the present Prime Minister of the East German Republic, and by Max Fechner, who subsequently became Minister of Justice till he was arrested in July, 1953, as "an enemy of the Party and the State").

Having made this confession, Buchwitz collapsed and had to be carried out.

The next speaker was the Social Democrat Friedrich, who ultimately became editor of the official Party newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, and whose argument was that, given what he called "the historical situation", a merger of the two parties was indicated. But the meeting broke up without any decision having been reached. It was clear to me, however, and I think to my colleagues also, that the opponents to a Popular Front Party on the other side of the table would be either outvoted or cowed into submission. The final decision lay with Otto Grotewohl, who was then undecided but who, the Russians

felt confident, could fairly easily be won over. Their confidence was fully justified by events. Before the month was out—on February 27th, 1946—the Socialist-Communist merger into the newly-founded Socialist Unity Party (S.E.D.) was publicly announced.

I might add that the Socialist delegate who launched such a violent attack on the Soviet authorities was destined before long to become one of our most faithful collaborators and a devoted official of the S.E.D. in Leipzig.

The Soviet approach to the Christian Democrats and Liberal Democrats was more direct, even more cynical and no less effective. From July 1945, when the Soviet authorities were bound by the Potsdam Agreement to allow the so-called "bourgeois" parties to operate, until 1949, the Party leaders in the various districts had to report daily to the Soviet Headquarters. I was present on one such occasion when the Chairman of the Liberal Democrat Party, Professor Kastner, and the present Speaker of the People's Chamber, Dieckmann, were received by the Head of the Political Department of the Soviet Administration in Saxony. That was at the end of 1946. An article had appeared in an L.D.P. newspaper to which the Soviet Major took exception, as it was critical of the S.E.D. When Kastner and Dieckmann attempted to defend themselves, they were cut short with the curt injunction to do what they were told. Whereupon both withdrew, bowing.

The same unequivocal attitude had been adopted towards the Social Democrats, with the same results: with few exceptions they withdrew, bowing, and merged with the Communists.

When the official "marriage" ceremony was finally held in Dresden in early April, there were scenes of indescribable enthusiasm. Main speakers were Buchwitz for the Social Democrats and Matern for the Communists. Buchwitz, now recovered from his heart attack, made a highly emotional speech, which left hardly a dry eye in that packed hall. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive . . ." Senior officials of the S.P.D. and the K.P.D. on the platform embraced each other, tears streaming down their faces. Delegates in the body of the hall

abandoned themselves to the same exultation, as they linked arms and sang the International. Everyone was convinced at that moment that a new era in the history of the international labour movement had dawned.

Nor was this merely an ephemeral outburst of emotion. In Saxony, as elsewhere in the Soviet Zone, membership of the new Socialist Unity Party went up by leaps and bounds. In the first—and only free—elections held in the Soviet Zone in October 1946, the S.E.D. gained 51 per cent of the votes cast. This majority was a genuine one. The fact that later elections had to be rigged is in itself a sufficient indication of the popular support lost by the S.E.D. in the subsequent years.

IO

THE German Communist Party's relations with the other parties were, of course, by no means so clear cut as those of the Soviet authorities. Officially, we were Moscow's protégées, but, in fact, as I have already tried to make clear, the Russians regarded us as highly suspect. Stalin is said to have remarked once that Communism fitted Germany as a saddle fits a cow, a sentiment entirely in keeping with Stalin but equally out of keeping with Marxism. We were dealing, however, not with Marxism, but with that by-product, Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism. This all-important fact was just beginning to dawn upon me.

My main preoccupation at that time was a highly practical one: to arrange an alliance that had been agreed upon, in principle, by all the parties concerned. Even the Church had given its consent. To produce a Free German Youth Movement that would work demanded, however, more than goodwill. We, the East German Communists, had to prove that we could gain—if we did not already possess—majority support. The Youth Movement was our first Trial by Ordeal.

The first “Präsidium” of the Free German Youth in Saxony consisted of thirty-five members, male and female; some young in fact, others only young in name. Seven were from the Liberal Democrats, nine from the Christian Democrats (two of these were representatives of the Churches), eight from the Communists, eight from the Social Democrats, and the remaining three were non-Party delegates. On the face of it nothing could be more democratic. I knew, however, that

the eight Communists and eight Social Democrats would soon be members of the same party and I was confident that the three non-Party members of the Executive would also join that Party. In short, we would soon have a working majority.

The "Sekretariat"—the executive body—was more of a problem. As the Youth Leader for Saxony, I would inevitably be a member; I had already decided who should be responsible for administration; another key post—that of Political Training—was given to a third member of the Communist Party; the remaining posts were finally distributed between the S.P.D., the C.D.U. and the L.D.P. It was not difficult to arrange for these appointments to be "unanimously approved".

An incident at the first Free German Youth Parliament made us all realize, however, on what dangerous ground we were treading. The object of this "Parliament"—as the name implies—was to underline the ostensibly democratic and non-Party nature of the movement. Speaker after speaker, especially from the S.E.D., protested that accusations of a sinister Party influence behind the Youth Movement were entirely unfounded. The main purpose of these assurances and protestations was to stifle the qualms of the Church leaders. As the leader of the largest delegation—from Saxony—and as the designated Chairman of a Special Committee to draw up the Movement's Statutes, I had been carefully briefed by Erich Honecker, who warned me, in particular, that the Church delegates would raise a number of objections to certain of the Statutes and that, if necessary, considerable concessions were to be made to them. Unfortunately Honecker forgot to give the other Party members on the Committee the same instructions as he had given me. With almost disastrous results.

Our Committee meeting had barely begun when both the Church delegates objected to certain stipulations in the draft statutes. Before I could accept their objections, however, the Youth Leader for Saxony-Anhalt rose and heatedly rejected them. Only then did I realize that Honecker had failed to pass on the Party's instructions to my colleagues.

It was an ironical situation. I had been empowered to grant concessions far beyond what was being demanded, yet I found

myself involved in a long and spirited discussion with another Party member. Finally my colleague agreed to abstain from voting and the revised statute was passed, with the Church having wrung from us a mere fraction of the concessions it could have extracted. And, as it happened, the effect of the impromptu argument between myself and another member of the S.E.D. had been to impress the Church delegates that we were in deadly earnest in our avowed determination to make the Free German Youth a strictly non-Party organization.

So far, so good. When the meeting was over, I took my opposite number from Saxony-Anhalt into a corner and explained the line the Party had decided to adopt. Quite unaware that one of the Church delegates was still in the room, I did not mince my words any more than Honnecker had done in talking to me.

"Lenin once said: 'There are compromises and compromises'. If the Church delegates had not been so stupid, they could have had much more out of us. We need the co-operation of the Church now, if we are going to undermine its position later."

I expounded the Party line to him at some length. He pointed out, quite rightly, that it was a dangerous policy, for there was always the risk that the Church would not only maintain but increase its influence in an organized movement of this kind. I finally convinced him, that, for better or for worse, that was the Party's policy: the iron fist in the velvet glove.

Next morning Honnecker, in a state of great agitation, explained that my conversation had been overheard and faithfully reported. The Church delegates were threatening to leave the Parliament en bloc. Bishop Dibelius, Protestant Bishop of Berlin and Brandenburg, had now refused to address the Parliament.

As a member of the "Präsidium" I had to resume my place on the platform when the second day's proceedings opened, but I could have wished myself a thousand miles away. I had been given specific instructions not to speak under any circumstances and I already had an inkling of the terrible ordeal to come when the delegate of the Evangelical Church mounted the rostrum. He gave a detailed account of the incident the

previous day, beginning with my spirited defence of the Church's case in the Committee meeting and ending with my exposition of the Party line afterwards. I was convinced by then that both my career and the Free German Youth Movement were at an end. Then I heard, with unimaginable relief, the closing sentences: the Church delegates had accepted the firm assurance both by the S.E.D. leaders and the Soviet Military Administration that my remarks after the meeting had been pure speculation on my part and that nothing would be done to bring the Youth Movement under the influence of any one political Party.

The fact that the Party was using me as a scapegoat did not—and still does not—disturb me. I was, after all, ultimately responsible for the indiscretion, although the original fault lay with Honnecker. But at that moment my sole feeling was one of incredulous relief that the Church delegates should still have decided to give the S.E.D. the benefit of the doubt.

The next part of the proceedings, however, was painful. As the Church delegate returned to his seat, I could feel every eye in the hall on me. I knew that everyone expected me to speak, yet I had been given specific instructions to say nothing. The reason for that instruction was clear to me when my old colleague from Breslau, Heidenreich, came to the rostrum. He proposed that the "Bialek affair" should be investigated by a special Committee, which would then report back to the Central Council of the Movement. This was approved and, for the moment at least, my face was saved. But I had to admit to myself, with a heavy heart, that the Party would have to dismiss me.

I said as much to Honnecker. He grinned. The Party, he said, had no intention of sacking one of its senior officials at a time like this merely to reassure a few Churchmen. The affair would blow over.

I must confess I did not share his confidence. Nor did I feel too happy about Honnecker's verdict that the real culprit was the Youth Leader from Saxony-Anhalt, who, by opposing me in the meeting, had shown a lamentable lack of Party discipline. He alone would be sacked.

Both he and I were given strict instructions to deny the most damning of our conversation, when the special Committee met. The unfortunate Church delegate, instead of sticking calmly to his original story, became almost inarticulate with rage. Looking back now, I am not particularly proud of that incident in my life. Nothing was easier than to involve my accuser in self-contradictions. This time my colleague from Saxony-Anhalt was word-perfect. The Committee adjourned, without reaching a decision. Four months later it issued a statement which was completely non-committal. No more was heard of the affair.

Had the Church leaders taken my indiscretion more seriously, the entire non-Party basis of the Youth Movement, which the S.E.D. was able to exploit to such good effect, would have fallen away. What has today become one of the main channels of Communist indoctrination in the Soviet Zone would have been suspect from the beginning as a Party organization. Yet I had, quite unwittingly, done the Church at least one service: I had prevented Bishop Dibelius from appearing in person at the first Youth Parliament, a concession on his part which, I think, he would bitterly have regretted.

II

BEFORE long I was deeply involved in preparing for the provincial elections in Saxony, the only post-war elections in the Soviet Zone, in which all political parties were allowed to put forward their own lists of candidates. The Christian Democrats and Liberal Democrats made the mistake, however, of offering the electorate a programme which was completely impracticable. Their promises of a new era if they were returned to power may have been in accordance with sound democratic practice but they were not designed to impress people who had just emerged from the most devastating war in history, and were still too busy licking their wounds to be interested in fine phrases.

Official S.E.D. speakers like myself were given clear instructions to promise nothing but "toil and sweat". This note of stark realism was a psychological triumph. Hitler had succeeded and failed with promises which had brought only tragedy. The age of miracles was over.

It was during this election campaign, in June, 1946, that the Head of the Political Branch of the Soviet Military Administration, Captain Jerochim, decided to accompany me on one of my whirlwind tours of the province. As we were driving through the town of Meeranc, Jerochim suddenly sat up and pointed to a man on the pavement.

"You see that man? He is a typical German petit bourgeois."

I thought no more of this random remark till we were driving through Glauchau some time later. Again he sat up and pointed to someone on the pavement.

"You see the fat one there? A typical German bourgeois."

What was all this leading up to? He shrugged off my question and began once more to hum a Russian folk song.

The answer came as we were driving through the mining town of Zwickau, when Jerochim again pointed. This time it was a coal miner, obviously on his way home from work.

"There you have the German worker, the proletariat," he said triumphantly. "He looks exactly the same in every country. Dress him in the clothes of the other two and he will still look like a worker. But dress the other two in his dirty clothes and they will still look like petit bourgeois or bourgeois. Each one is a type; every class has its type. You only have to look at a man to know what class he belongs to." He turned suddenly and stared at me. "What sort of type are you? What class do you belong to? All of them. And none of them. I have seen you in dungarees and I would have taken you for a worker. But look at you now! You're a typical German petit bourgeois. The other day, when I saw you receiving a French youth delegation, you looked like a typical German bourgeois. That's dangerous. That is why I do not trust you German Communists. But you are more dangerous than most, because you are an idealist."

My first reaction was to laugh; then, as we argued, I grew angry. But I found myself thinking back upon that strange incident in the years of growing disillusionment that followed. I do not believe for one moment that Jerochim could already foresee that I would become a bitter opponent of his "type" of Communism. He was merely expressing that deep-seated mistrust of the Germans which was so widespread—and understandable—among the Russians. To him a German Communist was a German first and then a Communist. I doubt if he ever asked himself whether he was not a Russian and a Communist in the same order.

The word "idealism" cropped up in another interview that has stuck in my mind. It took place after the provincial elections, from which the S.E.D. emerged with a small working majority. Hermann Matern was transferred from Saxony to become Chairman of the S.E.D. in Berlin and a member of the Central

Committee. I visited him shortly before he left Dresden and asked him, in the course of conversation, why so many of the "old Communists" were now in local government posts, while the Party was short of trained men.

"Many of our most experienced men," Matern admitted ruefully, "are only interested in getting soft jobs. That's one reason why the Russians mistrust and even despise us. Take Fritz Selbmann (who ever since 1946 has held a series of lucrative economic posts and is today Minister for Heavy Industry) or Kurt Fischer (until 1950 head of the People's Police). Neither of them will take Party posts. They earn much more money in their present jobs, although they are responsible to a Party official who is very much their junior in pay and experience."

Why did the Party not expel them? I demanded. Matern laughed. The Party could not afford to expel people like that, till it had trained new men to take their places. He gave me a few details of the private lives of Selbmann and Fischer, which left me speechless. I was still young and naïve enough to believe that being a Communist implied a certain standard of moral behaviour, and still more so in the case of a senior member of the Party.

"My dear Robert," said Matern gently, "don't be too hasty or too severe in your judgments. You've seen enough of the Gestapo's methods to know how they can demoralize a man. We are not all given the same power of resistance to physical pain or mental torment. And most of us have been subjected to trials by ordeal which only saints or fanatics can endure. The world we are living in now has no room for either."

I knew that he was trying to warn me but I was too profoundly shocked by what he had told me to pay much attention. The idols around me were revealing their feet of clay.

A few weeks later I was given yet another glimpse of the uneasy, almost hostile, relations between the Soviet authorities and the German Communists. In November, 1946, the Central Committee of the S.E.D. decided to transfer me from my post of Youth Leader for Saxony to the Party post of Youth Secretary for Saxony. Not, on the face of it, a revolutionary change, but

it did mean, in fact, that I would become a Party official responsible to the Central Committee instead of coming directly under Jerochim and the Soviet Military Administration.

When I took my successor, Heidenreich, along to introduce him to Jerochim, he refused to see him. I pointed out that I had received an order from the Party which I could not disobey.

Three days later Honnecker arrived in Dresden with his Deputy, Paul Verner. Both were furious. They assumed (quite wrongly) that I had engineered this incident because I was opposed to the transfer (which I was). I still go hot and cold when I remember their interview with Jerochim.

Verner made a bad beginning by talking Russian. Jerochim pointed out that he thought it important that Bialek should know what was being said. Verner flushed with anger, when Jerochim added: "Besides, I shall probably understand your German better than your Russian."

But there was worse to come. When Jerochim demanded written confirmation of my transfer, Verner pointed out that Honnecker and himself were senior officials of the Communist Party and could surely be trusted.

"The Soviet Military Administration is not in the least interested to know something it knows already: the posts you occupy in the Party," said Jerochim, lips tightly compressed. "We must have it in writing."

Verner, who had done all the talking, then asked to see Jerochim's immediate superior, Colonel Watkin, but with no better result. Watkin supported Jerochim. Verner and Honnecker finally withdrew, angry and bewildered.

Their next move took my breath away. I was to obey Party orders, lay down my present job and see what happened. It did not take me long to give my answer. I had no intention of becoming personally involved in a dispute between the S.E.D. and the Soviet authorities. Surely, the Party could fight its own battles, without using me as a whipping-boy!

Two days later I was summoned to Jerochim's office. Colonel, later Major General, Tulpanow, Head of the Political Branch for the Soviet Zone, was expected. While we waited,

I asked Jerochim why he had treated Honnecker and Verner in such cavalier fashion.

"Most Germans are cowards," retorted Jerochim, with a quick glance in my direction. There was just enough emphasis on the "most" to take the rough edge off the insult.

At that moment Tulpanow entered the room and every Soviet officer there, including Colonel Watkin, stood rigidly to attention. They remained like that, while Tulpanow spoke to them in Russian and listened to what appeared to be objections from Watkin and Jerochim. Then, with a few concluding sentences, he was gone. He had decided that, in the interests of good relations between the Soviet authorities and the S.E.D., my transfer should be allowed to go through. That made me an official of the Socialist Unity Party. I felt intensely relieved that the deadlock between the Soviet and German authorities in Saxony had been broken.

I was now in charge of all Free German Youth groups in Saxony. I set up a central Youth Committee, which consisted of the Land Youth Leader, a Government representative, the Dresden Youth leader and the young Party Deputies to the Saxon Land Parliament—with myself as Chairman. This Committee was, so to speak, the Youth Cabinet for Saxony, which not only formulated the policy of the Free German Youth but also controlled all other youth organizations. But as Chairman I had the power of veto.

Looking back, I realize that the extraordinary powers wielded by Party Secretaries like myself virtually strangled the Committees. They remained, as the Party intended them to be, a mere empty gesture to the democratic principle.

One of my duties was to lecture at the Party Training School. I was soon aware of the fact that my knowledge of Marxism-Leninism left a great deal to be desired and applied to the Party for permission to attend a course of theoretical training. The Land Secretariat approved and even suggested I might qualify for the most coveted of the Party schools, the Karl Marx Academy in Kleinmachnow near Berlin; that, however, would require the approval of the Party's Central Committee in Berlin, for, as a rule, admission to the Karl Marx Academy

was only possible after a successful course at a provincial Party school and an intensive oral test by a Commission of the Central Committee.

Both conditions were waived in my case and it was decided I should attend a special course for senior Party and State officials. So in September, 1947, I went back to school. When I left it at the end of May, 1948, a month before the blockade of Berlin began, I had passed all examinations with distinction.

I was only thirty-two, fresh from the Karl Marx Academy, when the Central Committee of the Party decided to appoint me Political Commissar, with the rank of Inspector-General, in the People's Police. I was naturally flattered—who would not have been?—by such promotion at a comparatively early age. On the other hand, I had never worn uniform and did not much relish the thought of wearing it now. Nor was I particularly happy to leave Saxony. But my first duty was to the Party, and eight months of special training at the Party's expense had placed me under a special obligation.

I spent several days paying farewell visits, during which a few more scales dropped from my eyes.

I called first on Fritz Grosse, today a senior official with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with whom I had always been on fairly friendly terms. Partly, I feel sure, out of friendliness but also because I was now senior enough to reduce the risk of confidence, Grosse spoke with remarkable frankness.

"Watch your step in Berlin, Robert," he cautioned me. "You may find the ground a bit slippery under your feet sometimes. Go carefully."

When I asked him what exactly he meant, I could see he was not over-anxious to be drawn out.

"You know as well as I do," he began hesitantly, "that there were three groups in the old K.P.D. (German Communist Party): the extreme centralists, the moderate centralists and the democratic centralists. The three groups are still more or less equal in strength, particularly since the incorporation of the Social Democrats, but I have the impression that, before very long, the extremists under Walter Ulbricht will gain the upper hand. That's why I'm telling you to watch your step. With your

temperament you won't find it easy, but don't forget that theory alone is not enough. You'll have to learn a few tricks."

"Tricks!" I exclaimed, scornfully. "Why should I learn tricks? I haven't any enemies in the Party. I'm not interested in intrigue."

Grosse laughed. When I remember that interview, I realize that there must have been more pity than admiration in his laughter. But my naïvete was to receive a very much greater shock.

I called on Otto Buchwitz, one of the leading Social Democrat architects of the merger with the Communists and at that time Joint Chairman of the Socialist Unity Party in Saxony. Since then he has been awarded the highest honours of the East German Republic.

I was shown into his study, where the usual civilities were exchanged. Then, at a given moment, Buchwitz uttered the same warning as Grosse, though much more earnestly. I can still hear him saying:

"I'm afraid for you, Robert; afraid that your frankness will get you into trouble. Do be careful."

I had not taken Grosse's warning very seriously, but, coming now for the second time within a matter of hours, it intrigued and even alarmed me. I pressed Buchwitz to be more specific.

He stared into space for a time, obviously weighing up in his mind the risk involved in speaking too frankly. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"I wouldn't be talking to you like this if I did not like you and trust you," he said at last.

He paused, eyeing me sharply, as if he expected me to give him some assurance, but I knew much less about Buchwitz than he about me.

"There are three people in Berlin you must be careful of," he went on in a low voice. "Ulbricht, Fischer and Selbmann. Fischer will be your immediate chief. He's going to Berlin as the new Minister of the Interior. But Ulbricht's the most important of the three, of course. He's determined, with the help of the other two, to get rid of any Social Democrats who

stand in his way and to run the Party in his way. So if, at any time, you feel like disagreeing with any of these three, be careful. They wouldn't hesitate to throw you out or even . . . to liquidate you."

I could hardly believe my ears. Selbmann had just been appointed Deputy Chairman of the new Economic Commission and was now in charge of East German industry; Fischer, as newly-appointed Minister of the Interior, would now be in charge of all the police forces; Ulbricht was then—and still is—the most powerful figure in East Germany. Yet Buchwitz was virtually accusing them not merely of plotting against the Party they had helped to form but of being murderers. It seemed to me then so outrageous that I immediately suspected a trap. Buchwitz had been told to test my loyalty!

The mere thought of it made me furious. I demanded to know what evidence Buchwitz had for making such a preposterous charge and threatened to report our conversation to the Central Committee.

I knew from Buchwitz's reaction that my suspicions of a trap had been unfounded. The old man's face seemed to break up. I thought for a moment he was going to burst into tears. Then he said in a low, hoarse voice:

"All right, Robert, I'll tell you and you can judge for yourself. As you know, I was an enthusiastic champion of the merger between the two left-wing parties. Even at the cost of making myself unpopular with many of my Social-Democrat colleagues. What a blind fool I was! I curse the day when the Social Democrats in the Soviet Zone committed suicide. You no doubt think I'm mad or just getting old, but perhaps you can explain why I am followed and spied upon like a common criminal."

His eyes left my face for the first time and shifted to the window:

"The chief spy lives over there."

I knew, without following his eyes, that he was staring at Fischer's villa, just visible through the trees. But I could not look away from his face. My brain was in a turmoil. Was he, in fact, mad? Or just senile? His expression was that of a desperately

tired and embittered man but still in full command of his faculties.

"I know what you're thinking," he continued with a sad smile. "I thought very much the same at one time. When I first came back from a longish duty-tour—my wife had gone with me—and found that my secret papers had been disturbed, I put it down to carelessness. But when it happened again a few weeks later, I decided to make a check. I noted the order of the letters in one of my secret files and tied a silk thread where it could not possibly be detected. When I came back, the order of the letters had changed and the thread was broken."

His face quivered with sudden emotion.

"That was bad enough," he burst out hoarsely, "but they don't make any attempt at concealment now. They don't even bother to close the filing cabinet again. And somehow that hurts me most of all. I've devoted my whole life to the cause of the workers, spent years in Nazi prisons and concentration camps, only to be treated like a traitor. I can't even talk in private to my closest Party associates without feeling that every word I say is overheard."

I was suddenly seized by a chill sense of apprehension.

"Where do you talk to them?" I asked. "Here in your study?"

Buchwitz nodded.

"Of course. Where else?"

I signalled to him to say no more but to follow me out of the room. There in the corridor I explained to him in a whisper that there was probably a small microphone concealed somewhere in the room. On the other hand, could he trust the "closest Party associates" he had mentioned.

He nodded emphatically and mentioned the names of three leading Social Democrats, Hauffe, Wendt and Friedrichs, who were among his most frequent visitors.

The first two men were subsequently charged with treason and liquidated. Buchwitz has frequently been accused by his former colleagues in the West of having betrayed them and many others besides. I find this hard to believe. Buchwitz was an old man and, in some respects, a weak man but he never

seemed to me a man capable of handing over his friends to the hangman. Everything he did—or failed to do—from the part he played in forming the Socialist Unity Party to his failure to seek refuge in the West, can be ascribed to his political naivete and his weakness. Moreover, as long ago as 1948, he was in extremely poor health. The fact that he is still alive seems to me—and probably to him too—little short of a biological miracle. And, if he was, as has been claimed, an agent of the Russian Secret Police, then what he had to say to me in the corridor outside his study that day makes no kind of sense. As it was, I found his story almost impossible to believe.

He began by accusing Fischer of having murdered Friedrichs, who, until his death a few months before, had been Prime Minister of Saxony and one of Buchwitz's closest friends.

I asked him if he had any proof.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "I did have. But I'd better tell you the story. Four days before his death Friedrichs came to me late one night—it was after ten o'clock and asked if I could spare him an hour or so. I told him to sit down. Before he did so, he laid a thick file of papers on my desk and asked me to read it through carefully. He would wait. It took me about two hours to read the papers through. I was horrified. Here was conclusive proof that Fischer, Saxon Minister of the Interior, had murdered—directly or indirectly—nine of his immediate collaborators. There was also fairly substantial evidence that he had been responsible for liquidating several others. These documents were the result of almost a year's discreet enquiries by a Party-member specially detailed by Friedrichs for the job, after a number of officials of the Party and administration had died in mysterious circumstances."

Analysing in retrospect my reactions to this hair-raising story—none the less incredible, of course, for being told in a subdued voice in the corridor outside Buchwitz's study—I can only compare my horrified scepticism to that of many Germans who heard, or read, in the pre-war years of the Nazi concentration camps. In my case, I was still suffering from a sort of trained incapacity. Like many of my Party colleagues, I was so physically and mentally engrossed in the day-to-day work of

indoctrination and organization that the private lives of the Party leaders were less familiar to me than to many newspaper-readers in the West. In fact, I assumed, I suppose, that the Ulbrichts and Fischers, like myself, had no time for private living. And that assumption made it difficult for me to attach any evidence to Buchwitz's story. Yet, especially when he came to talk about Friedrichs' death, there was a ring of truth about it.

I had a sudden vision of the two men sitting that night in Buchwitz's study with, I was already half-convinced, a concealed microphone recording every word they spoke. What were they to do? On the face of it, Friedrichs, as Prime Minister of Saxony and a senior member of the Socialist Unity Party, was in duty bound to lay the evidence he had accumulated before the First Secretary of the Party, Walter Ulbricht, but not only was Fischer Saxon Minister of the Interior and an old Communist whom Ulbricht would protect at almost any cost, he was also known to stand very high with the Soviet Military Administration and the Secret Police.

Both men felt that their only safe course was to contact their own former Party leader, Otto Grotewohl, and Friedrichs told Buchwitz that, for the next few days till they travelled to Berlin, he would leave the file in his safe at home instead of in the office. Finally, around two o'clock in the morning, he left.

A few hours later his wife telephoned Buchwitz to tell him that Friedrichs had been found unconscious in his study. Buchwitz hurried to his friend's house, but Friedrichs died three days later without regaining consciousness. The doctor ascribed his death to heart-failure. But Buchwitz had no doubt that the tea left in the study for Friedrichs by his wife had been poisoned and the incriminating documents removed. For it did not take Buchwitz long to discover that the bulky file he had read through the night before had disappeared. Who else but Fischer had an overpowering motive for silencing Friedrichs and destroying the evidence?

After Buchwitz had concluded his story with the renewed warning that I should beware of Ulbricht, Fischer and Selbmann, I could think of nothing to say. My mind was grappling

furiously with what Buchwitz had told me. I had spent the most crucial years of my life fighting against the Nazis because they showed a cynical disregard for human life and liberty, yet I was now expected to believe the same of my own Party leaders! On the other hand, if there was no truth in what Buchwitz had said, why had he said it? Particularly to me? And why had he not told Grotewohl?

He had an answer to that. Once the evidence had been destroyed, it seemed pointless—and even dangerous—to carry such a damning story to higher quarters. But when I expressed the view that he should still talk to Grotewohl, he promised to do so.

I have no way of knowing if he ever kept his promise, but it may not be without significance that, later in 1948, the American Military Government in Germany approached Social Democrat Headquarters in Hanover with the query, whether they would have any objections to Grotewohl's seeking asylum either in West Germany or in another part of Western Europe. They replied that they would. In my view, it was an unfortunate decision, but particularly so if, as I suspect, Grotewohl was toying with the idea of fleeing to the West because the death of Friedrichs finally brought home to him what a tragic mistake he had made in promoting the merger of Socialists and Communists. And, even if Buchwitz decided after all to keep the true circumstances of Friedrichs' death to himself, Grotewohl must have had some equally compelling reason for planning flight and his defection at that early stage would have had tremendous repercussions in the Soviet Zone.

WHEN I took up my new post in the People's Police, I continued, to my bewilderment, to hold most of my previous offices. I was still a member of the Central Council of the F.D.J. and of its Committee for Saxony, as well as sitting—on paper, at least—in the Parliament of Saxony and on two of its Committees, in the People's Council and one of its Committees. I pointed out to my superiors that I could not possibly do my new job properly and continue with the others. The "others" were shrugged off.

Immediately on my arrival in Berlin, I reported to Erich Mielke, who was then Vice-President of the Ministry of the Interior and is today Assistant Secretary for State Security. Fourteen days later Fischer's appointment as Head of the Ministry of the Interior was announced.

My first encounter with Mielke was not a very happy one. His secretary, who wore the uniform of a Police Major, asked me to wait a moment. I waited half an hour, then asked if Herr Mielke was at a meeting. No, she replied, there was no one in his room. I stood up and made for his door. She jumped up with a terrified look and barred my way. Three police officers who had joined the "queue", two Colonels and a Lieutenant Colonel, were watching the scene with the keenest interest.

"Don't worry," I reassured her. "I'll see that you're not held responsible."

I pushed her gently but firmly to one side and opened Mielke's door. I found myself in a large, plainly but comfortably furnished room. Behind an outsize desk sat Mielke, a stocky figure with

the head of a bulldog. His grey-green eyes flickered over me then beyond me to the door. I closed it.

I made no attempt to conceal my anger at being kept waiting. Even Pieck had had the courtesy to invite me into his office before he finished what he was doing, and at that time I was relatively small fry. Now, as the Party official responsible for all the police forces in the Zone, I did not regard myself as junior to Mielke and I was certainly not prepared to feed his vanity by waiting meekly in his outer office till he chose to summon me. In future I would walk straight in.

Having said that and watched Mielke gradually master his first access of rage, I stated my requirements: an office, a secretary and, to begin with, five assistants.

Mielke combed through his thinning hair with his fingernails, a gesture I was to become all too familiar with, when he was at a loss. It was clear that no arrangements had been made for my arrival. I accepted Mielke's suggestion that I should put up, for the time being, at the Police Academy and, having promised to return next morning to inspect my office and staff, I went off to look over my new quarters. I reached the Academy after spending about two hours in town to find that the sergeant on duty had received no instructions to get a room ready. I asked him to ring up Mielke. He obviously thought I was mad. But when I rang Mielke myself and asked him sharply why he had not even bothered to have the necessary instructions telephoned through, the Police Sergeant's manner changed to one of near-abjection. He positively showered titles on my head, till I reminded him that, as I was not yet in uniform, it was quite enough if he addressed me as "Comrade". He immediately became a human being. He was also, he admitted, a Party member but, in his position, he was expected to stand to attention on the slightest pretext. Mielke, it appeared, was primarily responsible for this revival of Prussianism.

As I lay in bed that night, I found myself wondering whether the social revolution we had so desperately fought to achieve would ever materialize. Certainly not while there were still Mielkes to clothe themselves in a false authority and Police Sergeants to bow down before them.

The following morning I told Mielke that I would make a tour of the Zone, talk with the Chief of Police in each of the five Lands, then inspect the frontier police. But to begin with I wanted to meet the personnel of the Ministry. Mielke, after a few sarcastic remarks about my energy and keenness, agreed to conduct me round the building in half an hour's time.

That was my first experience of the "discipline" in the new East German Police force. As we entered each room, everyone sprang to attention. And these were not mere Police Sergeants but senior officials who were presumably engaged on important administrative work.

As I had been given to understand that discipline was one of my responsibilities, I told Mielke, when the tour was over, that there was to be no more barracks-square behaviour in the offices. I found it both undignified and time-wasting. Mielke's furious protests told me what I had suspected all along, that he was the culprit. And, as I had come to mistrust him profoundly, I issued instructions to all departments, before I left on my tour, that in future the work of the Ministry was not to be disturbed by official visitors, however exalted they might be. A comparatively trivial incident, perhaps, in most countries, but in the Soviet Zone of Germany personalities played, and still play, an enormous part; I knew that I had not exactly ingratiated myself with Mielke.

The next three weeks I spent touring the Zone. The Chief of Police in Saxony-Anhalt was one of the most colourful personalities in Eastern Germany, Wilhelm Zaisser. Under the "nom de guerre" General Gomez he was Chief of Staff of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. Franco's victory cost him two years in a Soviet prison, but, with the Nazi invasion of Russia, he was released and spent the war years "converting" German prisoners of war. In 1945 he returned to Germany in the wake of the Red Army to become Chief of Police in Saxony-Anhalt, then Saxon Minister of Interior in succession to Fischer and finally, in September, 1950, Minister for State Security, a post he held until July, 1953, when he was stripped of all his offices for plotting to overthrow Ulbricht. He has not been heard of since.

When I first met him in 1948, I was impressed. He had built up a police force in Saxony-Anhalt that was superior in training and morale to that of any other Land. In Saxony things were very different. There was practically no discipline at all. But it was Thuringia that made me realize how urgent was the need for a Zonal organization. Here I found that 75 per cent of all the Police officers had been transferred straight from the Army and in several of the frontier posts I visited the entire staff were former Nazi officers. When I pointed this out to the local Party headquarters, I was assured that these men had all been in P.o.W. camps in Russia and had been drafted into the police with the approval, and indeed on the instructions, of the Soviet military administration.

I returned to Berlin to find Kurt Fischer installed as President of the Department of the Interior and G.O.C. all police forces in the Zone. Remembering what Buchwitz had told me, I decided to let Fischer do most of the talking at our first interview. Although we had met frequently in Saxony, it had always been on a strictly formal basis, and, as I entered his office, I could feel his protruding eyes sizing me up. He knew, and I knew, that I was the Party and he the Government. He had the ear of the Soviet authorities, I of the Party's Central Committee, and they did not always agree.

Fischer laid his cards on the table. He made no secret of the fact that the Department of the Interior would before long be a Ministry controlling not only the police forces but also the military formations that were about to be set up and the Security Police. This was the one branch of the administration to which the non-Communist parties, including the Social Democrats, would not be allowed access. Only tried Communists would be appointed to the responsible posts.

So far he had said nothing that I did not already know. But when he came to personalities, I found myself thinking back once more on that conversation with Buchwitz. For Fischer proceeded to brand each of his immediate colleagues in turn as an unprincipled intriguer. Mielke, of course, was included. And Fischer clearly saw himself as the architect of the new German Army equipped—I can still remember the words

rolling off his tongue—with Soviet tanks, heavy artillery, planes and even warships. Five Nazi generals had already been picked out by the Russians and were being prepared for their future duties. But this ambitious plan could, it appeared, only be realized if I was ready to throw in my hand with him and support him against the intriguing nonentities around him.

There was no cunning in his appeal. It was as brutal and unsubtle as the man himself. I forgot my wise resolution to let him do most of the talking. I still had sufficient naïve faith in the Party to believe that its weaknesses lay not so much in its doctrines as in its personalities.

I pointed out that, if he had any fault to find with Mielke and others, he should tell them so to their faces. If they were inefficient or intriguing, he only had to dismiss them. As for my entering into a sort of secret alliance with him, the only ally I recognized was the Party and I assumed that he felt the same.

I knew from the expression on his face that he despised me for my idealism. And he made no secret of it when he replied. Apparently I did not realize that I was now occupying one of the key posts in the Soviet Zone. In fact, between the two of us—he as administrative head, myself as political head of all the police forces in the Zone—we could build up an unassailable position.

The fact that Fischer was talking high treason did not shock me nearly so much as the fact that he regarded the Party merely as a means of furthering his own personal career. I started talking heatedly about the Party line and the democratic principle. He brushed it aside with a contemptuous wave of his hand.

“It’s you and me, the people at the top, that decide the Party line. You’ve got to make up your mind which side you want to be on.”

I pushed back my chair. I had learned a great deal—a great deal too much—in the past half hour. Amongst other things I knew I had made a dangerous enemy.

“I’ve made up my mind,” I said, as I left the room.

His outer office was empty but the door of Mielke’s office

was open. Mielke was standing there with a puzzled expression on his face. He had heard every word.

He motioned me inside and closed the door.

"What was all that about?"

"As if you didn't know! Just a slight difference of opinion."

He gave me the sort of man-to-man look that I had already come to mistrust.

"Fischer's a megalomaniac," he said, dropping his voice to a confidential whisper. "Ever since he came, he's ordered me around as if I was a lance-corporal."

I could not help laughing. If the Department of the Interior was any criterion, what was needed in the Soviet Zone of Germany was not socialism but psycho-analysis.

Mielke did not like that. He flushed angrily and was just about to hit back, when the door opened and we both swung round. It was Fischer. He eyed us suspiciously.

Nothing better to do than stand around gabbing? Mielke looked sullen. All I could do was grin. Fischer turned and went out, slamming the door behind him.

"You see how he carries on? It's like that all the time."

"The trouble is you resent it when he treats you like dirt," I said, "but you behave just the same to the people under you."

Mielke chose to ignore that.

"If you and I don't do something about it, Robert, Fischer will ride roughshod over us. Don't you see, we've got to hang together and make Fischer realize that he's not God Almighty."

I let him go on. I was curious to hear just how close he would come to the "alliance" Fischer had proposed only fifteen minutes before. By the time he had finished I knew that there was only one difference: Fischer was the bigger and more dangerous of the two. In fact, Mielke was the type Fischer might well have used to set a trap for me. That possibility certainly crossed my mind.

"I'm not taking sides," I said, "I'm here to do a job for the Party. So are you and Fischer. I don't think we need say more than that."

"I think you'll change your ideas, Robert," said Mielke as I went out.

What was I to do? Shrug my shoulders and make the best of a bad job? That was impossible so long as I believed that the Socialist Unity Party had been founded for a purpose, to give back to the people of East Germany something that Hitler had trampled underfoot, their self-respect. On the other hand, I did not feel disposed to go along to the Central Committee, after my first interview with Fischer, and expose him as a treacherous and ruthless opportunist. They would only have my word for it.

In the end I decided to have an informal chat with the Party Secretary in the Department of the Interior itself. He had not as yet had any experience of Fischer but he had had plenty of time to observe Mielke at work.

I learned a little more about the inner so-called democratic working of the Party. I should have realized that the Department's Secretary was a policeman first and then a Party man. Ten times a day he had to spring to attention in front of Fischer and Mielke. It was too much to expect of him that, when the periodic Party meeting came round, he should suddenly assume the role of senior Party member and treat Fischer and Mielke like any other rank and file. No, Mielke had made himself the key Party man in the Department of the Interior, and Fischer would take it for granted that he, as Head of the Department, should assume the Party mantle, unless I made my position quite clear.

The first opportunity to bring matters to a head came at the next Party meeting. Fischer gave a talk on the international situation. It was superficial and obviously unprepared, and it contained a number of grave ideological mistakes. Yet if these Party meetings had any meaning at all it must be to provide the senior official with an opportunity to keep his junior colleagues informed of the major issues and to encourage the common run of Party member to take an active interest in affairs of State.

When Fischer had completed his lecture—he spoke for about an hour—I felt compelled to make one or two remarks about the purpose of such a Party gathering and the duties of any Party member called upon to address it, whether Minister or

doorkeeper. And I seized the chance to add a few comments on the Prussian type of discipline which I had seen so much in evidence in the Department and at the Police Academy. I did not pull my punches.

I could see that neither Fischer nor Mielke was particularly happy and that the storm of applause which broke when I sat down did not make my remarks any more palatable. But I had no regrets. As speaker after speaker rose to support what I had said, I realized how much frustration and resentment Mielke had sown among his subordinates. Fischer made it clear to me after the meeting that he regarded my speech as a declaration of war. Although I was in a strong position, I knew that he would stop at nothing and, if all that Buchwitz had told me was true, he had powerful friends.

DURING the night of June 24th, 1948, all passenger and goods traffic on the railway line that runs from Berlin through the Russian Zone to Hanover was cancelled because of "technical difficulties". The central control station of the Berlin Electricity Works, situated in the Soviet Sector, received orders from the Soviet military authorities to stop all supplies of current to West Berlin because of "coal shortage". All food supplies to West Berlin were cut off. The blockade of Berlin had started.

Ten days later the Soviet military administration announced that special militarized formations of the People's Police would be set up. One of their duties would be to patrol the Western frontiers.

In fact, however, a Soviet military order had been issued at the beginning of June and the militarized formations it provided for were on a much more ambitious scale than that of mere frontier police.

The first Commander of these emergency formations was Hermann Rentsch, who had been a Lieutenant-Colonel on the Russian front till he was taken prisoner and became a member of the "Free German National Committee" in Moscow. After the war he attended the Lenin Academy and the Prwolsk Military Academy at Saratow. He was given the rank of Major-General and is today in command of the Northern Army Corps of the so-called People's Police.

Rentsch arrived in Berlin with his new Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Vincenz Müller, another former member

of the Free German National Committee, who was second-in-command of the 4th Army when it capitulated to the Russians in 1944. Today he is Deputy Minister of the Interior.

I made no secret of the fact that it was, in my view, highly dangerous to employ ex-Nazi generals, Fischer brushed my objections aside. Political considerations were entirely irrelevant. We were acting on Russian orders.

Shortly afterwards, three of the five generals who accompanied Rentsch and Müller took the first opportunity of fleeing to the West and the West Berlin and West German Press published long extracts from a speech of welcome Fischer had given on their arrival in East Berlin, in which he boasted of the tanks, heavy artillery and planes with which the People's Police was soon to be supplied.

In the weeks that followed I saw a great deal of both Müller and Rentsch. I can still remember the first visit Müller paid me. No sooner had he stepped inside my office than his heels came together with a resounding click and I would not have been at all surprised if he had given me the Nazi salute. His lean face lacked only a monocle. He was in the uniform of a Major-General.

During the halting conversation that followed I found myself thinking time and again that, if I had fallen into his hands only a year or two ago while I was still with the underground, he would have strung me up on the nearest tree. Yet there he sat now determined to make the right impression. What had happened? Was it just that he responded to rank and uniform as automatically as an alcoholic to the right type of bottle? Or was my new status really a symptom of something deeper?

The question was still unsolved in my mind when Müller asked for permission to take his leave. I managed to keep a straight face till he had left the room.

Yet of the two I preferred Müller to Rentsch. Müller might be a type and, to me, an unsympathetic type but at least he had a recognizable identity. Rentsch was fluid, an opportunist who exploited the opportunities made by others. Müller managed to wear his uniform as if it belonged to him; Rentsch always looked as if he had borrowed it and took an inordinate delight

in wearing it. Both, I am convinced, are unprincipled but at least Müller has style.

Rentsch accompanied me on a tour of the Soviet Zone in August, 1948, which was to mark the beginning of the East German armed forces. I had been detailed to form the first two divisions of militarized People's Police. All 20,000 men were former German P.o.W. who had "volunteered" in Russia for service in the Soviet Zone. They arrived from the Soviet Union in batches of 1,500 to 2,000 and were sent to a camp at Fürstenwalde near Berlin to be deloused, clothed and supplied with papers.

As each trainload of men arrived, marching into the barbed-wire enclosure with a military band at their head, I had to take the salute. I could see that our blue uniforms with the familiar badges of the Red Army were arousing considerable interest.

It did not take me long to discover that a large percentage of these men had belonged to S.A. and S.S. battalions. I refused to enrol them. Fischer's reply, as with the ex-Nazi generals, was that we were acting on Russian orders. But I still refused and the following day the Central Committee sent down a special commission to make investigations. The Commission reached a typical compromise. At all costs the matter was not to be taken up with the Russians. S.A. and S.S. men were to be enrolled but arrangements would be made for them to be dismissed immediately after.

This seemed to me sheer lunacy. Besides, as I pointed out, many of these men were refusing to enter the People's Police on the grounds that they had been misled. They had been asked to volunteer for service in a normal peace-time Police force not in an army. It seemed clear to me that, if we forced them into barracks, they would seize the first opportunity of deserting.

The Central Committee was adamant. It was, for some obscure reason, essential that a force of 20,000 men should be set up as soon and as secretly as possible.

By mid-September the first phase was completed. Saxony had eight of these emergency police detachments, Saxony-Anhalt seven, Thuringia six, Brandenburg and Mecklenburg

five. Each detachment—between 600 and 700 men—was in charge of a Commander (Lieutenant-Colonel). Most of them were ex-Nazi army officers, who either reimposed the traditional discipline of the German Army or shrugged their shoulders and let some Party official get on with it.

My first tour of the Zone after the emergency units had had time to settle down was a hair-raising experience. Although I myself had never done military service, I knew that this new force we had created would never stand up to any emergency.

I went back to Berlin and submitted a plan to Fischer for an elite detachment consisting of picked young men from the Party and the Free German Youth. Fischer agreed and I spent several weeks forming the Ernst-Thälmann unit, many of whose founder-members have since risen to senior rank in the People's Police.

Throughout this whole period I was still called upon to fulfil my various other duties as a Member of the Saxon Parliament, of the Central Council of the Free German Youth and of the People's Chamber. But my main preoccupation was with Fischer and Mielke. I knew that they were merely biding their time.

When the attack on me was finally launched, it came from an unexpected quarter. I had owed my rapid promotion not merely to my boundless energy but also to my knowledge of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. To be challenged on an ideological question by Mielke was the last thing I would have expected. And yet that is exactly what happened.

Mielke rang me up one day and asked if I had a few moments to spare. No sooner had he entered my office than he opened fire. I had committed a grave "theoretical" error in my latest instructions to the Police Colleges. I had spoken of "international imperialism". There was no such thing.

I gave him chapter and verse to substantiate my conviction that "international imperialism" did exist. He made no attempt to enter into an argument but merely replied with a complacent smile that Walter (Ulbricht) had noticed the mistake and wanted it deleted from the instructions I had issued.

I knew then that Mielke had been primed and the mere

idea that he should have been allowed, indeed encouraged, to lay a trap for me was more than my quick temper would tolerate.

"Then it's Walter who's wrong," I retorted sharply. "And if he thinks I've made a mistake, he should tell me himself, not through a stooge."

The last word hurt Mielke's vanity, as it was meant to do, but I could see that the feeling uppermost in him was not one of anger but of triumph. To dispute Ulbricht's judgment on matters of ideology was like questioning the infallibility of the Pope.

"So Walter, the Party's leading theorist, is wrong, is he?" said Mielke with obvious delight. "He'll be very pleased to hear it."

"That's as may be," I replied. "But do you seriously believe he's the leading theorist in the Party? Why he's not even good, much less the best. He's a brilliant tactician but, when it comes to the Marxist-Leninist ideology, he's not a patch on Anton Ackermann."

I realized that I was playing into Mielke's hands. The rivalry between Ulbricht and Ackermann—or, more accurately, Ulbricht's jealousy of Ackermann—was an open secret. It was based not merely on Ackermann's vastly superior knowledge of Marxism but also on the fact that Ackermann believed in practical not ostensible collaboration with the Social Democrats, in what he called "the German way" to Socialism. He took the view, in short, that the Socialist Unity Party should live up to its published aim of representing the German working class. Not unnaturally he was supported in this by the East German Social Democrat leader, Otto Grotewohl, who, in October, 1949, became the first Prime Minister of the East German Republic, a post he still holds. Ulbricht, on the other hand, has never regarded the S.E.D. as more than a façade, behind which he can pursue his own policy of filling all key-positions with tried Communists. Ironically enough, although my sympathies were entirely with Ackermann, I knew that, as long as Ulbricht continued to dominate the Party, my own position should be relatively secure, for much of the cream of the German Communist Party had been skimmed off in Nazi concentration

camps or in Soviet purges. Trained Communist officials were at a premium.

Several days passed before I heard anything further of my alleged offence. In the meantime I had become involved in a disagreement with Fischer over my definition of discipline. It seemed to me that, as we were intent upon creating a new type of police force in accordance with our political principles, we must allow each member of it the right to refuse to obey an order, if he believed that order to be inconsistent with the teachings of Marxism-Leninism. He must, of course, be prepared to take the consequences if proved wrong.

Fischer was strongly opposed to my view, on the ground that no military or even para-military organization could afford that amount of individual freedom and that it would provide endless opportunities for sabotage. It seemed to me that saboteurs could equally well exploit unconditional obedience and that the right to disobey an order on a question of principle was adequately protected by the penalties for abuse.

Two days later Ulbricht addressed the officers of the Department of the Interior on the subject: "People's Police and Block Policy". The ludicrous position of the bourgeois parties (Christian and Liberal Democrats) in the so-called Democratic Block had become particularly blatant when it came to forming a body like the People's Police and Ulbricht made it brutally clear that this was one domain from which they were to be rigidly excluded. The People's Police were to be indoctrinated and trained along strictly Marxist-Leninist lines.

I remember that lecture, which contained nothing new for me, because of the incident that followed. Returning to my office, I saw that Mielke's door was open and decided that this was as good a time as any to deal with the complaints that were constantly reaching me of Mielke's behaviour. He listened in silence but obviously with mounting fury, while I detailed the various charges that had been brought against him. Most people in the building were afraid to enter his office; he only had to put in an appearance for them to become nervous and unsure of themselves. Such an atmosphere was not conducive to good, productive work. As I had raised the matter with him before,

without apparent result, I proposed to make this a final warning.

Mielke paced up and down the room, his fists clenched, his face suffused with blood, then stopped behind his desk and glared at me. A stream of abuse came pouring out of his mouth, much of which I was prepared to shrug off with a grin. But when he accused me of being a Titoist and assured me that Fischer shared his conviction, I knew that something would have to be done. The charge of Titoism was—and still is—one of the most serious that could be levelled against a member of the Party. Mielke in his rage had revealed that he and Fischer were plotting to remove me not merely from my present post but from the Party. There was only one course open to me: I must take the whole matter up with the Central Committee.

Mielke, perhaps because he realized that he had said too much, could no longer control himself. For a moment I thought he was going to have a stroke. His right hand moved from his throat to his head, then dropped to his chest. As it disappeared inside his coat, I realized what he was doing. I drew my own revolver just in time. His hand dropped.

I remember the thought flashing through my mind that such a scene could not really happen outside Hollywood. The thought passed quickly enough but I was left with a certain sense of unreality, as I walked out of his room, and a sneaking suspicion that, to an outsider, the whole incident must have seemed rather foolish.

I4

THE following morning I rang Ulbricht, who was the member of the Politbüro responsible for the Police, and made an appointment for five o'clock that afternoon. He was just about to leave his office when I arrived. He had an urgent appointment with the Soviet Military Administration. He suggested that I should either come back the following day at the same time or talk to his secretary, Lotte Kühn. I would have preferred to talk to him.

"Have a talk to Lotte," said Ulbricht. "You can still come back and talk to me tomorrow."

It seemed a strange suggestion, but at the time it was not commonly known that Lotte Kühn was Ulbricht's wife. Nor was I then aware that Lotte Ulbricht, for reasons best known to herself, had taken Mielke under her wing.

Her office was two doors away from Ulbricht's. She was small and rather dumpy, but her quick, self-assured movements impressed me. She invited me to sit down and talk quite openly. She would take notes and give Walter a full report.

I described conditions in the Department of the Interior and finally urged that both Fischer and Mielke should be relieved of their posts, otherwise the People's Police was in danger of falling into the hands of ruthless opportunists. I realized, of course, that Fischer and Mielke must have an opportunity of stating their case, but I suggested that they should be asked to do so before their Party colleagues in the Department.

I noticed that, when I mentioned Mielke's name, her face

stiffened, but at the time I thought no more of it. The last thing I would have imagined possible was that Mielke, whose dismissal I was now pressing for, would, with her help, become a member of the Central Committee and Deputy Head of Security.

Next day when I entered Ulbricht's office, I was surprised to find Mielke already there. Ulbricht sat behind his desk, paper and pencil in front of him. Not unnaturally, he had a habit of stroking his small goatee beard. He struck me as being too fat and one of the ugliest men I had ever seen. And his high-pitched, eunuch-like voice did not improve matters.

He began by referring to my conversation with Lotte Kühn the previous day but only to pass almost immediately to what he described as "one or two theoretical questions I wanted to discuss with you". Even if Mielke, sitting at the end of the desk, had not broken into a complacent grin, I would have known what was coming.

Ulbricht repeated the assertion Mielke had already made on his behalf that my phrase "international imperialism" was incorrect.

I fully realized why Ulbricht found it unacceptable. I was quite prepared to enter into an argument with Ulbricht on the subject, but there was something in the whole atmosphere of this interview that baffled me. If Ulbricht's sole purpose was to discuss the rights and wrongs of "international imperialism", why had he summoned Mielke to be present? And why had he shelved the charges I had made against Mielke and Fischer?

One possible explanation that occurred to me immediately was that Mielke was there to produce in me exactly the confused state of mind into which I was falling. Ulbricht was the very man to adopt such tortuous tactics. I decided, therefore, that I must ignore Mielke for the time being and give my whole attention to what Ulbricht was saying.

Ulbricht himself helped me by remarking, with an edge to his voice, that the concept "international imperialism" arose directly from the "German way to Socialism", which, he added, "you people in Saxony were so proud to have invented".

I was both irritated and bewildered. His remark about "you

people in Saxony" was a quite unwarranted, oblique attack on Ackermann. And it had no connection, as far as I could see, with "international imperialism". I could not figure out what Ulbricht was up to. But at least I was not prepared to let the first point go unchallenged.

The "German way to Socialism", I pointed out, had not been invented or discovered in Saxony but by the Central Committee of the S.E.D., of which Ulbricht himself was a member.

Ulbricht corrected me: Ackermann was the originator. I stuck to my point. Ackermann, as Propaganda Chief of the German Communist Party, had published an article in February, 1946, two months before the formation of the Socialist Unity Party, in which he expounded the theory that Germany must work out her own, as against the Soviet, form of Socialism. This theory was produced as part of the campaign to bring Communists and Social Democrats together into one Party. Ackermann must therefore have had the full approval and support of the Central Committee. Proof of this was that his theory had been incorporated in all official textbooks for the Party training-schools.

Ulbricht tried to interrupt at that stage but the whole sequence of events was suddenly clear in my mind and I was determined to go through with my argument.

Once the two left-wing Parties had been successfully merged, the divergence of views inside the Central Committee became manifest. Ackermann had evolved his theory out of genuine conviction, and he was not alone in this. (It was not until the rising of June 17th, 1953, that the adherents of the Ackermann policy came out into the open. Zaisser and the editor of the Party newspaper, Herrnstadt, were both expelled from the Party for plotting the downfall of Ulbricht. Ackermann was deprived of all his Party offices.) Ulbricht, on the other hand, had obviously accepted the "German way to Socialism" as a carrot to dangle before the noses of the Social Democrats. Once they were safely locked up in the stable, the carrot was thrown away. Unfortunately Ackermann had agreed, in the interests of the Party, to accept the entire responsibility for the "mistake".

He had indulged in self-criticism. But I personally regretted Ackermann's self-immolation.

I noticed out of the corner of my eye that the grin had faded from Mielke's face and that he was watching Ulbricht with tense expectancy. Ulbricht himself showed no signs of emotion.

"I was never in agreement with the Ackermann theory," he said coldly.

Then why, I demanded, had he not voiced his disagreement in the Central Committee? But, apart from that, perhaps he would explain what the concept "international imperialism" had to do with the "German way to Socialism".

Ulbricht's only reply was to repeat his categorical assertion that they followed logically on one another. He made no attempt to explain. He seemed to take it for granted that I would accept his interpretation without question.

I moved over to the attack. Out of my despatch case I produced three copies of the official Party newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, in which the phrase "international imperialism" was used repeatedly not only by Major General Tulpanow, Political Advisor to the Soviet Military Administration, but also by the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party. And there was no doubt in my mind that their use of the term was perfectly consistent with the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. For, just as the Proletariat, according to Marx and Lenin, is national in structure but international in its aims, so imperialism is international in its structure and national in its aims. In short, the international trusts and combines against which Communism was fighting could only be described as "international imperialism".

Ulbricht still appeared unmoved by my direct challenge to his authority. He seemed in no hurry to answer but sat with his eyes fixed on the blotting-pad in front of him. There was something offensively complacent about his attitude.

I suggested sarcastically that, if he did not feel inclined to defend his viewpoint against a mere mortal like myself, perhaps he would state his case against me in our international review.

Even that did not evoke anything beyond a faint smile, but

Mielke leapt to his feet and advanced on me threateningly. If I did not address the Deputy Chairman of the Party with more respect, miserable pig-dog that I was, he would knock my teeth down my throat. When I had recovered from my momentary surprise, I pointed out that I had dealt with bigger and better men than Mielke in my life. Moreover he seemed to assume that the Deputy Chairman was incapable of defending himself, an assumption that was not exactly flattering.

Events were promising to take a squalid turn. Ulbricht intervened at that point and told Mielke to sit down. Then, when order had been restored, he came out with a reply to my argument that left me speechless. Comrade Tulpanow and the Polish Central Committee must be wrong, because Lenin had made no mention of international imperialism in his standard work, *Imperialism as the final stage of Capitalism*.

If I had not known that Ulbricht was in deadly earnest, I would have burst out laughing. Lenin had written his book in 1916, yet it was still accepted as absolute gospel in 1948! It was like arguing that Marx's picture of conditions in England a hundred years ago was still applicable in every detail to the England of today!

The most appropriate reply seemed to lie in a quotation from Stalin: "There are two kinds of Marxism, the dogmatic and the creative and I take my stand on the latter."

Even Ulbricht's icy composure was at last shaken. Twin spots of colour appeared on his cheekbones, as he stiffened in his chair.

"This has gone far enough," he snapped. "The concept 'international imperialism' is false and you will delete it from your instructions."

I could have obeyed without any way impairing the instructions I had issued. And I knew that refusal to obey would not go unpunished. Ulbricht was not the Party, not even its Central Committee, but he was powerful enough to carry a great deal of weight. But, partly because of that, I did not hesitate for a moment. The idea of a monolithic Party, incorporating in one or a few individuals the age-old doctrine of the divine right of kings, was something I could not stomach. And at the back of

my mind there was always the thought that Ulbricht was one of those who had spent the bitterest Nazi and war years in a Moscow hotel while lesser mortals like myself were rotting in concentration camps or fighting in the underground.

It seemed pointless to remind Ulbricht of that. I contented myself with stating that my conscience would not allow me to obey an order which was both unreasonable and unnecessary. I would retract on one condition: that he published an article in our international review, in which he stated his case against the use of the phrase "international imperialism" and mentioned that not only I but also Tulpanow and the Polish Central Committee had been guilty of a dialectical error.

Ulbricht stared at me with narrowed eyes. So this, he sneered, was a practical demonstration of the new brand of obedience that I was striving to apply to the People's Police.

There was, I remarked, a slight difference. Obedience, in the Party, was not to any one individual but to the Central Committee. All that he, as Secretary of the Party, could do was to call upon me to carry out a Party decision.

"Then I call upon you, in the name of the Party," he interrupted curtly, "to withdraw the phrase 'international imperialism'."

He must have known that he was exceeding his authority, but I confess I derived considerable satisfaction from reminding him. The question at issue had never been considered by the Party; Ulbricht was arrogating powers to himself which, if left unchallenged, would make him a dictator.

Ulbricht's voice was shrill with rage. Apparently I did not realize that, in defying him, I was defying not the Central Committee but the Soviet military authorities, who were alone responsible for the police in the Zone.

That was his trump card. Disobedience meant disciplinary action by the Soviet Military Administration. But I was too deeply committed now to be browbeaten into subjection. Besides, in producing his trump card, Ulbricht had revealed how little regard he had for the authority and principles of the Party when his own personal prestige was at stake.

The real purpose of the interview was now clear to me.

Confronted with grave charges against Fischer and Mielke—both, as I subsequently discovered, protégés of his—Ulbricht had decided that I must be “induced” to resign from the People’s Police. The charges would then die a natural death. He was on firm ground and knew it, for, as the Party had no jurisdiction over the Police, any complaint I addressed to the Central Committee must automatically be passed on to the Soviet Military Administration. Ulbricht had worked it all out with diabolical shrewdness.

The “Bialek Affair” began that day in Ulbricht’s office, and yet, in one respect, it both began and ended there. The cynicism of such men as Fischer and Mielke had angered me but I regarded them as eminently expendable. Ulbricht’s roots went much deeper; his cynicism shocked me as a deliberate act of treason must shock a true patriot. Ulbricht is no cheap opportunist as are so many of those under him, but a man whose overpowering belief in himself arises from a profound contempt for his fellow men. Like Stalin before him, he is a Theist with himself as God.

I had grown up—and now I was thinking aloud—in the bitter school of poverty and unemployment. The Communist Party crystallized all my hates and fears and all my hopes into something tangible. The works of Marx and Lenin had come to me as a revelation. I had clung to it through all the Nazi years, in prisons and concentration camps, and finally I had fought for it, single-handed. Only to be told by no less a person than the Secretary of the Communist Party that he stood above the Party, that the best and most painful years of my life had been in vain, that principles were unimportant, obedience was the first law.

I told Ulbricht there was no further point in my remaining in the People’s Police and that I would hand in my resignation to Fischer in the morning. Ulbricht promised to clear it with the Soviet military authorities. It was after nine o’clock when I left. Our discussion had lasted four hours.

The following morning I wrote to Wilhelm Pieck, Chairman of the S.E.D., and subsequently first President of the East German Republic, explaining why I had decided to resign from

the People's Police. I never received even an acknowledgment. I doubt if my letter even reached him. Before the day was out, I had received from Fischer the official notification that my term of duty as Inspector-General in the People's Police was at an end. But, as I soon discovered, my conversation with Ulbricht was by no means at an end.

Seven years later, in July, 1954, the British government's White Paper on the strength of the Soviet Zone's militarized police force brought a sharp denial from Ulbricht that any such force existed. In fact, however, as he knows, the White Paper errs only on the side of understatement. By the end of 1948 the East German armed forces numbered not 10,000 but 20,000 men. By the end of 1952 the number had risen to 150,000 and today the total strength of the East German army, navy, air force and frontier patrols (as distinct from non-militarized frontier police) is 225,000 men. This could be trebled within a matter of weeks. For, not only have all administrative arrangements long since been made for a rapid mobilization, but there is also an enormous trained reserve already available. The so-called "Society for Sport and Technical Training" (Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik), which is nothing more than a semi-military training organization, has over 400,000 members. Many of the Society's instructors are officers in the People's Police.

Not surprisingly, the militarized People's Police virtually form part of the Soviet armed forces in East Germany. Training, equipment and even uniform are provided by or modelled on the Red Army. Every unit of the People's Police has a Soviet officer attached in an advisory capacity, but the "Sovietnik's" advice is always taken.

The East German armed forces have, of course, only been set up at enormous cost to the population. The widespread reluctance of the younger generation to wear uniform and live in barracks again could only be overcome by offering them extremely high rates of pay and rations on a scale that is unknown outside the higher ranks of the Party. Even so, however, the East German government has not succeeded in attracting more than 20 to 25 per cent of "loyal" soldiers. The remainder have

joined either because they were poor workmen earning low wages or because they fell victim to constant, unremitting propaganda. But during the popular rebellion of June 17th, 1953, there were innumerable cases of People's Police refusing to fire on the civilian population, and more than 10,000 deserters to the West since 1949 is another indication that, in the event of a civil war, the East German People's Police would not prove such an impressive fighting force as it appears to be on paper.

I 5

EARLY in November, 1948, after I had turned down several Senior Party posts in Berlin, I went back to Saxony. My brief experience of high-level politics had cured me for all time. I had only one ambition, to return to local politics, to essentials. As far as I was concerned, the episode in Berlin belonged to the past. I told no one what had happened in Ulbricht's office.

There had been several changes in Saxony since I left. Koenen, today East German Ambassador in Prague, had been transferred to Berlin and replaced as Chairman of the S.E.D. by Ernst Lohagen, an old Communist who, in 1952, was to be a victim of one of the periodic purges but who was subsequently reinstated and given a minor financial post in Potsdam. His Deputy, Mückenberger, was a young man who, until the end of the war, had been a Social Democrat and, as such, had taken over from Buchwitz. Both Lohagen and Mückenberger became pillars of the National Front, an allegedly all-Party organization which in fact has always been completely dominated by the S.E.D.

In December, 1948, I was informed that I had been appointed Chairman of the S.E.D. in the Grossenhain district of Saxony. On the face of it I had slipped quite a way down the ladder from Inspector-General in the People's Police to a district Party Chairman, but I was happy with the change, particularly as the Grossenhain district was not only an important agricultural area but also contained two of the largest new steelworks, at Riesa and Gröditz.

My first enthusiasm was short-lived. Everywhere I went I

met with a marked coolness. It seemed to have been universally agreed that I should be cold-shouldered. When I asked my Secretary for an explanation, she merely shrugged her shoulders and tightened her lips. The only two people who showed any inclination to treat me as a normal human being were the District Chairman of the Free German Youth and the Party's Youth Secretary. I decided to make a frank approach to the latter. He made no bones about it; he was delighted to hear of my appointment, but a message came through from Party Headquarters in Dresden warning all Party members that my views were suspect.

It was an impossible position. I had been appointed the Party's representative in the Grossenhain district but at the same time my authority had been undermined before I arrived. That the Central Committee was in any way responsible I did not for one moment believe. The warning had been issued without the knowledge of the Party leaders. But my immediate concern was with the effect not the cause.

I decided to summon a meeting of the Party Secretariat. They listened in silence to what I had to say. Never had I a simpler case to present. My appointment as their Party Chairman was an expression of the Party's confidence, yet the warning issued by the Party Headquarters in Dresden was an expression of mistrust. In plain, practical terms, however, I had a job to do which could only be done with the active co-operation of all those present. I left it to them to decide whether they would give me a fair chance of proving myself or whether they would condemn me without trial. The response was unmistakably cordial, with one exception, the Kader Secretary (shock workers' secretary), who remained ominously silent.

That hurdle, as I thought, successfully cleared, I called at the Soviet Kommandatur to meet my Russian colleagues. The Political Officer, Captain Frolow, a supercilious young man, expressed the hope, in very peremptory tones, that I would prove as assiduous as my predecessor, who had made a point of calling every day. That seemed to me an unnecessary waste of Frolow's time and mine. Captain Frolow clearly did not

agree and we spent the next fifteen minutes discussing, not without some heat, the relationship of a German Party official like myself to the Soviet authorities. In the end Frolow agreed that we need only meet when we had something practical to discuss. It was not the first—or the last—time that I found it necessary to curb the ambitions of young Soviet officers, but invariably they gave way to firmness. Unfortunately, the mere sight of a Soviet uniform seemed to have a paralysing effect on most Party officials.

Towards the end of that month I met the man whose name was soon to become a byword in East Germany, Adolf Hennecke. At that time he was still a miner working at the coal face but he had already performed the feat which marked the beginning of East Germany's Stakhanovite movement. He was the first German Activist. He himself described to a select gathering of Party officials how he came to exceed the average daily output by 380 per cent. He told his story haltingly and with obvious embarrassment.

He was picked out by Colonel Tulpanow, Political Advisor to the Soviet Military Administration, as the man most likely to set up a record and underwent four weeks' special technical training. It also took the authorities a considerable time to break down Hennecke's instinctive resistance, for he felt that he was letting his fellow-miners down. He was given a seam entirely to himself. When he had worked for four hours solidly, he decided to have a break and realized, to his dismay, that he had already exceeded the average eight-hour output by about 300 per cent. So for three hours he did nothing: time enough for all his qualms of conscience to come crowding back on him. He put in another hour's work before returning to the surface.

I can still hear Hennecke pleading with his audience not to make too much of his so-called record. Any coal-miner in the Zone could do it if he wanted to. Besides, he had already been ostracized by all his work-mates and had received a large number of anonymous letters.

The Party Chairman, Lohagen, made an extremely shrewd speech in reply, in which he ascribed Hennecke's doubts and fears to modesty and proclaimed him a "Hero of Labour" whose

epoch-making achievement the population of East Germany would very soon appreciate at its true value. Lohagen could not, of course, foresee that the Norm system, which began with Hennecke's carefully engineered record in 1948 and was exploited to the utmost by the East German government in the years that followed, would in June, 1953, lead to an outburst of popular resentment, which, but for the intervention of Soviet tanks, would have swept away the Grotewohl-Ulbricht regime.

In 1948 and 1949, when the Activist Movement was gathering momentum, opposition to a higher rate of productivity in the factories and coalmines of East Germany was more than offset by the material advantages to be derived. A wide range of consumer goods, including such foodstuffs as butter and eggs, could only be obtained in the State-controlled H.O. shops at high prices. The workers were, therefore, compelled to join in the production race if they were to enjoy even a tolerable standard of living by comparison with pre-war. The recognized Activists and Heroes of Labour were given not only higher than average wages but also certain privileges. They received priority in the allocation of new houses, for example, while their children received preferential treatment when they came to enter secondary schools.

The decision of the East German authorities to follow the example of the Russians and stimulate competition in industry was dictated by circumstances. The industry of the Soviet Zone of Germany has never shaken itself free from the tremendous reparations exacted by the Russians from post-war current production. But it also had other crippling burdens to carry, some imposed by the very nature of the regime. In the 1940s there was an acute shortage of raw materials which was made even more acute by the deliberate policy of stepping-up industrialization at the expense of agriculture. But perhaps the greatest handicap of all was the unwieldy and costly bureaucratic machinery, which is common to all the Iron Curtain countries.

The activist system was introduced in 1948 and developed with frantic determination in an attempt to make the industrial

machine work at such high pressure that these various burdens would be, if not removed, at least spread over the majority of the working population. By 1954 there were more than two and a half million Henneckes. I know of many large factories in East Germany where whole departments are manned only by activists. They take what living-accommodation they can find; their children are no longer given special educational facilities; their higher wages are swallowed up by higher prices, higher taxes and subscriptions to the various organizations they are compelled to join.

The screw-turning process of bringing average output into line with each new record that was set up has, of course, its limits, as was apparent in June, 1953, when the workers of East Germany came out into the streets. They began by demanding the withdrawal of the Norm system; within a few hours they were storming Ministries, Party offices and prisons and demanding the end of the regime. After Soviet troops had stamped out the rebellion, a "New Course" was promised, and for several months the pressure on the workers was relaxed. Prices came down and there were more goods in the shop windows. But all that is over now. The "New Course" is fading into the background; the spectre of the Norms is once more looming over the East German worker.

The East German government is as much a prisoner of its own policy as ever it was. Production has certainly been increased over the past seven years but at an enormous cost. The vast administrative machine is no longer the only drain on East Germany's resources of money and manpower; it has been duplicated by the so-called People's Police. Furthermore, the primary political objective of the activist system, to break up the traditional trades union solidarity of the workers, has not been realized. For every Activist who, in the first year of the movement, was a loyal adherent of the S.E.D., there are thousands today who are embittered opponents.

I6

IN the latter part of 1948 and the early months of 1949 I had every opportunity to test the workers' readiness to put their shoulders to the wheel and help the S.E.D. achieve their avowed aim of building up a new and better Germany. Grossenhain was then—and still is—one of East Germany's key industrial areas. Six of its seven State-controlled combines were singled out as the best in the Zone. And the Party saw a steady increase in membership. But elections were looming up and the Party leaders were taking no chances. They were determined not to have a repetition of the 1946 elections, when a secret ballot gave the S.E.D. a bare 50 per cent of the votes.

The elections for the People's Congress had been fixed for May 15th and 16th, 1949. On May 14th District Chairmen and Chairmen of Electoral Committees—all members of the S.E.D.—were summoned to Party H.Q. at Dresden. There we were briefed by the Party Chairman for Saxony, Lohagen, in the presence of the Minister of the Interior.

Lohagen displayed a specimen voting slip, the first we had seen. It had two circles, one for "Yes" and one for "No". Our instructions were that not only would a cross in the "Yes" circle mean a vote for the Party but also a cross in both circles. The voter, who had presumably made a mistake, was to be given the benefit of the doubt! If the word "No" was written in the "No" circle, then that too would count as a "Yes", for two negatives make a positive! Only a plain cross inside the "No" circle was to be accepted as a vote against the Party. Spoiled papers would be those on which abusive remarks were

written. All other "invalid" papers must be taken as votes for the Party.

I immediately protested that this method of counting votes was both unethical and unnecessary. Either we were confident—as I then was—that we had the majority of the population behind us, or we should be examining our consciences.

Lohagen accused me sharply of "objectivism" and then went on to stress that this was a decision of the Central Committee. Such decisions were not open to discussion.

Not the least of my anxieties was how to make this vote-counting procedure palatable to the non-S.E.D. members of the Election Committee in my district. I need not have worried—Christian and Liberal Democrats accepted the Central Committee's arbitrary ruling with scarcely a murmur.

The election result was a foregone conclusion. The S.E.D.'s list of candidates for the People's Congress—there were no alternative candidates—was approved by 66.1 per cent of the voters, of which about 15 per cent must have been rigged votes. I base that estimate on the Grossenhain district, where the exact figures were known to me. Out of 73.9 per cent votes for the S.E.D., 13.7 per cent were, in fact, spoilt papers. So 60 per cent of the population of Saxony were prepared to give the S.E.D. their vote. I would guess that about 10 per cent did so under some form of moral or psychological pressure. But that roughly half the population of East Germany in 1949 still believed the S.E.D. would keep its pledges must, I think, be accepted. And it was understandable. The activist movement was still in its beginnings and there were good wages to be earned. The food situation was slowly improving. And the unceasing propaganda promises had not yet reached that saturation point, at which credulity turns sour and cynicism sets in.

But whereas to the ordinary man and woman the situation seemed to be gradually improving the initiated could detect ominous signs of ruthlessness and unprincipled corruption. Having seen it myself in high places, I was still shocked, though not surprised, to find it nearer the ground.

A typical example came to my notice one day when an elderly

man called at my office to lodge a complaint. The local authorities, he claimed, were underpaying him for some car-hire work he had done. As a member of the Party he looked to me to see that he was properly paid.

If he had been unjustly dealt with, it was clearly my duty to help him, but he made a bad impression on me. I told him to send his car to my office the following day, so that I could make the disputed journey myself and check on the distance and petrol consumption. It was the sort of petty complaint I had to investigate carefully and, as things turned out, my time was by no means wasted.

As I drove out next day, I asked the driver how much he was earning.

"Thirty marks and all found."

"Thirty marks a week?"

He gave a rueful grin.

"A month."

It was a starvation wage. But when he added that his accommodation consisted of a shake-down on the office floor, I began to realize how right I had been to mistrust his employer. This was fully confirmed when the driver confessed that he had been told to bring me back by a detour that added a mile and a half to our journey. But there was more to come.

I asked him why he had accepted such a miserable wage. The answer was brutally simple. He had crossed the border to West Germany a few months before in search of work, only to find that there was more unemployment in the West than in the East. He made his way back again and fell into the clutches of his present employer who threatened to denounce him if he did not accept the terms offered.

But his was apparently not the worst case. In the same house were two elderly refugees, a tailor and his wife, both of whom were kept working a twelve to fourteen hour day turning out suits which their "employer" sold at a handsome profit. They received their keep and five marks a month pocket money.

The least I could do, if the driver's story was true, was to have the culprit expelled from the Party. But I also vowed

that I would move heaven and earth to make him pay some compensation to his victims.

He made no attempt to deny the driver's story. On the contrary he claimed that he was performing a public service by giving shelter to these three people. As I examined the house, I wondered how, with an acute shortage of living accommodation, a man of this kind had acquired an eleven-room villa. The look of terror on the faces of the two old people and the rich spread of food and wine that had been prepared for me provided the answer: membership of the Party gave him the power both to blackmail and to bribe.

Back in my office I set the wheels in motion to have him and those he had corrupted expelled from the Party, to transfer him immediately from his eleven-room villa to a two-room flat and to charge him before a criminal court with corruption and violation of the labour laws.

Within a month the wretched affair was settled. At least, so I thought. He and three local Party officials were expelled from the Party; he was also given a term of imprisonment and compelled to pay 2,800 marks compensation to the driver and 3,200 to the old couple. In the meantime I had this man's past record investigated. His claim that he had spent some time in a Nazi concentration camp was borne out but the reason for his imprisonment was not, as he had protested, membership of the Social Democrat Party. He had been found guilty on eight different occasions of blackmail and obtaining money by false pretences. I decided to keep this information up my sleeve for any emergency that might arise. It was not long in coming.

A delegate arrived from Party Headquarters in Dresden one day with a complaint that I had deprived a former Social Democrat of his means of livelihood and had been instrumental in getting him expelled from the S.E.D. I must withdraw all charges.

I naturally refused, and, when I divulged the facts of this man's record, the matter was dropped. But I was left wondering how a common criminal could enlist the support of senior Party officials, when there were countless cases of genuine hardship to which they remained blind and deaf.

Another case that came to my notice during the same period gave further evidence of the almost mystical power of the Party and the demoralizing effect it had on those both inside and outside it.

A lawyer by the name of Günther who was attached to the District Administrative Court (Amtsgerichtsrat)—he has since fled to West Germany—came to me in great distress one day and appealed to me for help. He had been ordered some time before to preside at the trial of a former Burgomaster named Eichler and a local government official who were charged with hoarding large quantities of butter and flour. At the time many people in the Soviet Zone were starving. Eichler was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, his accomplice to four. Before long, however, Buchwitz, former Chairman of the Social Democrat Party in Saxony, intervened on Eichler's behalf. He was released on grounds of ill-health and immediately fled to the West. Now that his accomplice had also been released on equally flimsy grounds, Günther felt that his position as a magistrate had become untenable. He was powerless against such senior Party officials as Buchwitz.

I pointed out in reply that the bottom had been knocked out of Buchwitz's case for releasing Eichler, when the latter fled the Zone. The same thing could not be allowed to happen again. Günther, as the responsible magistrate, must rearrest Eichler's accomplice at once. A medical examination would soon establish whether his health was really endangered or not.

Günther was obviously not convinced. As a non-Party member and the father of six children, he explained, it was dangerous for him to fly in the face of the Party.

I had already seen too much of Party intrigue to scoff at Günther's fears, but I could not allow both Günther and the Party to be compromised, to say nothing of the fact that a proven criminal was at large. I assured Günther that, whoever might be responsible for this miscarriage of justice—even if it was the Minister of Justice himself—this was a matter for the District Headquarters of the Party to decide. I gave him a solemn promise that, if the rearrest of this man led to his being reprimanded or victimized in any way by higher authority, the

District Headquarters and myself would stand by him. With that assurance Günther left to make the arrest.

As soon as he had gone, it occurred to me that I would be well-advised to take certain precautions. A few "spontaneous" resolutions could do no harm. It was one of the oldest methods of Party democracy and I could think of many less deserving causes for which it had been employed. I rang up the Party office in each of the industrial combines and related the facts. Then I told them to arrange for workers' deputations to demand the help of the Party in rearresting the criminal. Within two hours the first deputation was in my office. It is perhaps only fair to add that the two black-marketeers, when they were first arrested, had aroused the fury of the local population, so that the demonstrations were not quite so synthetic as many others I could quote. And once again I was glad I had prepared for any possible emergency. When a Party delegate turned up from Leipzig to protest—this time on behalf of the Ministry of Justice!—against the criminal's rearrest, I was able to quote the sort of evidence that no Party official, however exalted, could afford to dispute: a demonstration of solidarity by the workers.

I knew by now, of course, that each of these cases would be remembered against me. But I little suspected that the counter-offensive would come as it did. One day in June, 1949, a colleague remarked that his wife had heard I was being transferred to Chemnitz. I did not feel inclined to take this bit of gossip too seriously, even when the source was quoted. Buchwitz, it appeared, had been invited to dinner in the officers' mess of the "Ernst Thälmann" police brigade, which I myself had formed, and had mentioned my impending transfer to one of the officers, who had then passed it on to my colleague's wife. I could not imagine Buchwitz releasing information of that kind till the District Headquarters and myself had been informed. But for once rumour was true.

Towards the end of the month Lohagen summoned me to his office in Dresden, ostensibly to discuss preparations for the cession of the Oder-Neisse territory to Poland, but he clearly had something else on his mind. When he had stuttered and

stammered for a few moments, obviously in acute embarrassment, a flash of inspiration told me what he was trying to say.

"It wouldn't be my transfer to Chemnitz, would it?" I suggested.

He stared at me open-mouthed.

"How did you know?"

I told him that women were apparently discussing it over their shopping-baskets. But that was not so important. All that interested me was why I was being transferred.

Lohagen's next words left me speechless. I had apparently been accused of leading an immoral life, of being frequently the worse for drink and—the most macabre touch of all—of burning an embryo somewhere on my office premises.

I could not have been more astonished if I had been accused of witchcraft. Lohagen took advantage of my speechless bewilderment to add:

"It has also been reported that you order your colleagues around too much."

By now, the full iniquity of these charges had dawned on me. My whole body was trembling with rage. To have such accusations levelled against me at all was bad enough in all conscience, but to know that I had been tried, found guilty and sentenced without any opportunity of speaking in my own defence, that was the final indignity.

Lohagen admitted that the truth of the charges had not even been questioned by the Party H.Q. in Dresden but that my political and administrative record was such that nothing more drastic than a simple transfer was contemplated.

I was in no mood to argue with Lohagen. Besides the matter had gone much too far for him to be competent to deal with it. I demanded a special meeting of the Party Secretariat to consider the case, otherwise I would be compelled to take it up with the Central Committee in Berlin.

Lohagen had no option. He agreed, though with obvious reluctance, to summon the Secretariat next morning at ten and, with that assurance, I left.

Back in my office in Grossenhain I soon tracked down the fantastic story of the embryo. Two years before, a Party

official had been caught burning a three-month old embryo in the basement furnace; both he and the girl concerned had been dismissed. This gruesome crime had simply been transferred to me. But why? And by whom? All I could deduce from this sordid incident was that someone was implicated, who held a sufficiently exalted position to be able to dictate to the Secretariat in Dresden. My suspicions at once fell on Walter Ulbricht. Perhaps the meeting next morning would give me some positive indication of the culprit's identity.

Lohagen opened the meeting by describing the circumstances in which I had heard of my transfer and he again referred to the excellent work I had done in Grossenhain. That was the starting-point of my reply. On the one hand I was described as a drunkard, with the morals of a goat, on the other as a highly efficient administrator. The two seemed to me hard to reconcile. But my main complaint was that the Secretariat had acted not only unjustly but also in open violation of the Party's constitution. They should automatically have investigated the charges against me and they should certainly have given me a chance to refute these charges.

I noticed, while I spoke, that two members of the Secretariat were nodding approvingly, but Lohagen looked as if he regarded my remarks as a personal attack on him. One of the other two rose to support me in what I had said and, after calling on the Secretariat to admit it had slipped up badly, suggested that two delegates should be chosen to go to Grossenhain and make immediate investigations. It was finally decided that Lohagen and Otto Schön, today a senior member of the Central Committee in Berlin, should go.

The following day, however, only Schön appeared. Lohagen begged to be excused owing to "pressure of work". He had, very wisely, spared himself a very unpleasant experience. As Schön unfolded the sorry tale to the members of the District Secretariat, I could see that some were grinning while others were furious. The sole exception was the Kader-Secretary, who again remained silent. The reason for his silence very soon became apparent. Speaker after speaker poured scorn on the accusations levelled against me and expressed disapproval of

the Dresden Secretariat's high-handed action without any consultation with the people immediately concerned. Finally only Sorgers, the Kader Secretary, had not spoken. When called upon to express his views, he referred back to a conversation with me some weeks before, which seemed completely irrelevant. He had pointed out then that a number of former N.C.O.s in the Nazi Army were employed in our local office. My reply was that service as an N.C.O. in the Army was not a crime. If it was, then we must regard a large part of the population as unemployable.

The meeting ended with a resolution deplored the Dresden decision to transfer me and demanding the names of those who had brought such unfounded accusations against me.

The denouement came some weeks later, when Lohagen returned to Grossenhain to represent the Dresden Secretariat at our annual Party Conference. On the eve of the Conference I learned from Lohagen that scurrilous reports about me were still reaching him. I must confess my first impulse was to throw in the sponge and resign, but that would, of course, be taken as an admission of guilt. No, there was nothing for it but another Party meeting. This time, however, I was determined that it should cast as wide a net as possible and that the source of the reports should be exposed.

Lohagen agreed to attend a special meeting on the evening before the Conference, which would include not only the District Committee but also delegates from the large industrial firms. The Soviet Political Officer, Captain Frolow, got wind of it and asked if he too could be present.

On this occasion Lohagen turned up. As Chairman I explained the purpose of this emergency meeting and then handed over to my Deputy, Hoffmann. Lohagen outlined the charges against me; with one exception they were the same as before, but the exception made Frolow's interest in the affair suddenly clear to me, for I was now accused of anti-Soviet behaviour. I realized at once that this fresh charge was based on a recent difference of opinion between Frolow and myself. I had complained of the autocratic way he had treated two German officials while I was in his office one day. He was extremely

angry. It had all happened before and it would doubtless happen again, but I regarded it as one of my duties to establish relations of equality between Russians and Germans in my district. I warned Frolow—who incidentally had treated me with the greatest consideration since our first encounter—that, unless he adopted a reasonable attitude towards the Germans, I would feel bound to take it up at a higher level. He pointed out, quite rightly I am afraid, that most of the German Party officials he had to deal with showed no signs of resenting his behaviour. He could not treat as equals people he despised. I recognized the truth of that but retorted that it was up to him, as a responsible Russian officer, to play the friend not the conqueror.

I finally took it up with the Soviet military authorities in Dresden and Frolow was told to mend his ways. I had noticed no signs of resentment in him but I found myself looking at him now with some trepidation as the anti-Soviet charge was brought out.

Lohagen had no sooner finished speaking than there were cries of "Names". . . . "Who's responsible for these reports?" Before Lohagen had time to reply, Kader-Secretary Sorgers rose to his feet. His face was red, his voice trembling nervously as he quoted the Frolow case. He was suddenly interrupted by a loud Russian oath, as Frolow sprang from his chair. He apologized for interfering in a Party meeting but he could not sit in silence listening to such rubbish.

"Robert Bialek is one of the few Germans I have met who is not afraid to speak his mind openly. We respect him for that. There are too many Comrades in Germany who seem to believe that we like them to creep and say 'yes' to everything. That is not so. We despise them for it. Nobody denies, least of all Comrade Bialek himself, that he has his faults and makes mistakes. We all of us do. I made a grave mistake in treating most of my German comrades as inferior beings. I do not hold it against Comrade Bialek that he reported me to my superiors. On the contrary, I am extremely grateful to him. You may perhaps find that difficult to understand, but it is the truth. And, if I may say so, not Comrade Bialek but Mr. Sorgers (he made

it plain that he was deliberately omitting the 'Comrade') is guilty of anti-Soviet feeling for he clearly regards my bad behaviour as typical of my country."

I must be forgiven for remembering Frolow's impassioned speech almost word for word and the burst of spontaneous applause that followed. It was, I think, one of the proudest moments of my life.

The other charges against me were quickly disposed of. Sorgers was forced to be more specific. Where he produced dates on which I had allegedly been drunk or had committed adultery, I was able to prove—and in some cases there were witnesses present to bear me out—that I was otherwise engaged and always on Party business. What I did not feel it necessary to divulge was that, far from indulging in a riotous sex life, my constant preoccupation with my work had led to my wife seeking, and obtaining, a divorce. Lohagen, who knew that, apparently did not think it worth mentioning.

The drama of that meeting was not quite over. My name was put forward as Chairman of the Conference that was to open the following day and only three out of over seventy abstained from voting. But the repetition of all the trumped-up charges against me had left a bitter taste in my mouth and I asked leave to refuse. I pointed out that the Party Headquarters in Dresden had twice brought these false accusations. Lohagen interrupted to say that it was Sorgers who had brought them, but I brushed his excuse aside. He, as Chairman of the Party in Saxony, had taken it upon himself to have me transferred without investigating the reports from Sorgers and was therefore the chief culprit. How was I to know that the same thing would not happen again? I had a feeling that Lohagen was not the only one in the Dresden office who was prepared to go to almost any lengths to discredit me. So long as that state of affairs continued, I could not have any confidence in my immediate superiors and therefore asked that my name be withdrawn.

There was a deathly hush in the hall, when I sat down. After a moment Lohagen rose. He admitted that my censure of himself and his colleagues was justified but appealed to me, in the interest of the Party, to reconsider my refusal to take the

Chair at the Conference. As I had always upheld the view that Party must come before personalities, I was compelled to give way, but before the Conference was over I had reason to regret my change of mind.

I MUST, at this point, refer back briefly to an earlier incident which had its bearing on the Conference. The 1949 harvest in the Grossenhain district was a good one. There was therefore every reason to expect a good supply of grain. But when I asked the responsible official, Landrat Dietrich, to produce the plan of grain deliveries, I received a shock. In the first place, there were a number of glaring discrepancies. Delivery quotas seemed to have been fixed without any regard for the size and production capacity of farms. Secondly, despite these discrepancies, the plan had been approved by the Soviet Kommandatura. I immediately rang up Dietrich and told him this plan was quite unacceptable and would have to be considered at the next meeting of the Secretariat. I did not, at that stage, voice my strong feeling that the whole plan was highly suspect.

That feeling was expressed openly at the meeting. Dietrich's reply was that he too did not like the plan but that the Soviet Economic Advisor had drawn it up himself and presented it to him as a *fait accompli*. The explanation was a simple one. The Russians were receiving additional supplies of foodstuffs from a number of farms and these farms had accordingly been given a low delivery quota. There was nothing to be done about it, Dietrich pleaded. And, in addition, the Russians had also demanded that the political views of the farmers should be taken into account. Those who were known to be "reactionary" were to be penalized with high quotas.

If what Dietrich had said was true, then not only were the Russians creating a sort of black-market for themselves and

entering into direct and therefore quite illicit relations with the farmers, but—and this was much more serious—they were deliberately undermining the Party's efforts to gain the support of the farmers. As for Dietrich, he had obviously raised no serious objection to the Russian machinations and he had made no attempt to inform the Party Secretariat of what was going on. My colleagues agreed that I should contact the Russians immediately and lodge a strong protest.

I saw Frolow and told him the whole story. He, at least, shared my views and promised to report the matter to the Commandant. The following day I was summoned to the Commandant's office. Frolow and Dietrich were already there, together with the Soviet Economic Advisor, a Lieutenant-Colonel, and a Colonel from the N.K.W.D. Why the Secret Police should be represented, I could not understand.

The Commandant began by deplored the Party Secretariat's refusal to accept the quotas he had approved and demanding not only that we accept them unconditionally but also that we withdraw the motion of censure we had passed against Dietrich.

No two faces in that room wore the same expression. The Commandant was flushed with anger, Dietrich grinning delightedly. The Economic Advisor was glaring at me with undisguised hostility. Frolow looked tense. Only the N.K.W.D. officer seemed entirely disinterested in what was going on.

I pointed out that the Commandant had no authority to give orders to the Party, least of all in matters concerning internal discipline. I then explained briefly why I must refuse either to accept the quotas or to reinstate Dietrich in full favour. The Economic Advisor immediately leapt up from his chair and, in halting German, shouted that I would do as I was told. He had received his orders from Berlin and I had no option but to accept them. I retorted dryly that he might be prepared to obey wrong orders but I was not.

I gathered from the smiles on the faces of the Commandant and the Colonel, that their economic colleague was not particularly popular. The atmosphere in the room was not quite so tense. At the Commandant's request I explained in detail why we could not accept the quotas and, when the Economic

Advisor again intervened with threats, I warned him that if necessary we would make our opposition known to the public.

Frolow then suggested that two agricultural experts from the Soviet military headquarters in Dresden should be invited down and I agreed. At this point the N.K.W.D. Colonel asked a question which explained his presence. Could I think of any other reasons than those I had stated why certain farmers should have been given preferential treatment? I had to decide very quickly whether to repeat what Dietrich had told me or not. I decided against it, merely indicating that Dietrich was better informed than I.

The two specialists from Dresden left the issue undecided, for one of them was clearly reluctant to say anything that would damage the Lieutenant-Colonel. Not till three senior officers came down from Karlshorst was a decision reached. The quotas were scrapped.

I found myself remembering that incident on the opening day of the Party Conference in November, for, while I was making a final check-up on the arrangements in the Committee Room, Ulbricht's wife walked in. I had discovered that both Sorgers and Dietrich, whom I knew to be my most dangerous enemies in the District, were protégés of Ulbricht and his wife.

My first thought as Lotte Ulbricht entered the room was why she should come down specially from Berlin to attend a District Party Conference? It was certainly no chance visit. And her first words told me that she had broken one of the unwritten laws of the Party. She had arrived the previous day and should immediately have called on me. Instead of which she had spent the evening at Dietrich's where she was staying. Yet she admitted that she was attending the Conference as a representative of the Central Committee. I could see more trouble ahead. Lohagen and I were the only people present at the Conference who knew that Lotte Kühn was, in fact, Ulbricht's wife.

This fact proved acutely embarrassing when the Secretariat met that evening to discuss the day's proceedings: I had opened with a long speech, in which, among other things, I

reproached the Central Committee in Berlin with being too remote from the places where the groundwork was being done. This criticism was echoed in other speeches. I would have felt happier if more criticism had been levelled against our local Party activities. I said as much that evening. Lotte Kühn immediately made it clear that she, as the Central Committee delegate, had resented my remarks. A former Czech Communist, Mätzig, asked her to be more specific but she refused to be drawn out. Mätzig then accused her bluntly of being the sort of chatterbox this Conference could have done without. I could see that she was growing extremely angry and that Mätzig had no idea who he was talking to. Not that it would have made much difference to him. He was a man of great personal courage. And indeed, when she had stalked out in high dudgeon and I had divulged her true identity, Mätzig merely shrugged his shoulders and promised that, if she mouthed the same vague generalities at the next day's Conference, he would tell her exactly what he had told her tonight. I pointed out that he would be defying a Central Committee resolution to the effect that no member of the Central Committee could be criticized at Conferences or public meetings without the previous approval of the Central Secretariat of the Committee itself. An impossible and unmarxist resolution, of course, which was condemned as such a year later by Wilhelm Pieck, who had formulated it four years before, and was withdrawn. But at that time it was still valid, so Lotte Ulbricht alias Kühn stood in no fear of personal criticism.

No such ban protected me, of course, and Lotte Kühn devoted most of her speech the following morning to a personal attack on me. She not only quoted my recent brush with the Soviet Economic Advisor over the agricultural quotas as an example of intervention on behalf of the bourgeois farmers but brought up once again the charge of immorality, which I thought had been disposed of for all time. Lohagen, who was sitting beside me, was also a member of the Central Committee. He had passed my opening speech, which Lotte Kühn had just violently criticized and he had presided over the emergency meeting at which the charges of immorality were proved false.

I turned to him and asked in a whisper what he was going to say.

I could see from the strained expression on Lohagen's face that he was already turning that question over in his mind.

"I give you my word, Robert," he whispered, "that I did not know Lotte Kühn was going to attack you. I did not even know she was coming down here. But what can I do? She's a much more powerful member of the Central Committee than I am. And besides I cannot possibly stand up and openly contradict another member of the Central Committee."

Although I knew Lohagen was acting—or refusing to act—out of cowardice and despised him for it, I realized that there was a certain amount of truth in what he had said. Once more I was faced with a choice between Party and personalities and I did not hesitate. But, while I would do nothing to turn this Conference into the sort of farce it might so easily become, I had no intention of confessing to mistakes and crimes which I had never committed.

Lotte Kühn had already returned to her seat and I knew that every man and woman in that hall was waiting for me to step across to the rostrum. I knew too that their silence was with me, not against me. It was that thought that brought me to my feet. I have no recollection of walking to the rostrum or of making the short speech that followed. But I have the short-hand version of it before me as I write.

"Comrades, I am thirty-four years old. I have spent twenty of these thirty-four years in the working class movement. I have always tried to serve it to the best of my ability. Like many of you I saw the inside of Nazi concentration camps and prisons. You have just heard what Comrade Lotte Kühn had to say about me. I am prevented by a resolution of the Central Committee from replying as I would like to. In my view she has been guilty of several ideological mistakes, but she has also suggested that the mistakes she accuses me of were deliberate on my part. That amounts to saying that I am an agent or spy. That is the sort of accusation that can only be considered on the highest level. I shall therefore demand a Party inquiry both into the false charges against me and into Lotte Kühn's conduct in

making them. In the meantime you will appreciate that I cannot possibly stand for the post of First Secretary. I appeal to Conference to move on to the next item on the agenda."

There was complete silence in the hall as I sat down. I knew from a glance at my colleagues' faces that most of them were fighting a bitter struggle between personal loyalty to me and loyalty to the Party. There were tears in Mätzig's eyes.

The silence was broken by a steel-worker who rose in his place and demanded, on behalf of his delegation, that I should still stand for the post of First Secretary. "We steelworkers know nothing about Lotte Kühn. She's not even a name to us. But we know Robert Bialek and we want him as our First Secretary."

This was greeted with a tremendous burst of applause and, by the time two other workers' delegations had spoken in the same vein, the hall was in an uproar.

I was torn between gratitude and anxiety. Nothing would suit Lotte Kühn's purpose better than a resolution by the Conference opposing her and the Central Committee, for then my expulsion from the Party would be automatic. When the leader of the F.D.J. (Free German Youth) delegation rose to speak, I decided I must intervene. I thanked them for their expressions of loyalty but pointed out that the suggestion made by some to elect me, if necessary, against the will of the Central Committee was madness. I proposed a one-hour break for tempers to cool down.

I spent the next half hour talking to my Secretariat colleagues and the various delegation leaders, urging them not to court certain disaster for themselves and for me; Mätzig supported me and it was only with his help that I succeeded in breaking down the stiffest resistance of all, that of the steelworkers. It was a striking example of the tremendous spirit of corporate loyalty, which the trades union movement had instilled in these men and which the Communist Party had not destroyed. Of the 580 delegates at the Conference almost 100 left in protest.

Before the Conference was resumed, a special meeting of the Secretariat was called. Lotte Kühn took charge. She put the

question point blank: were all agreed that I could not stand as First Secretary? Rudi Hoffmann, after a few bitter words about Central Committee dictatorship, accepted my withdrawal on behalf of the F.D.J. delegation. Mätzig refused to take any further part in the proceedings and declared his intention of abandoning active Party work. Lotte Kühn remarked that he would be well advised to do so, as his conduct the previous evening had been inexcusable. Party discipline, she went on coldly, had reached an all-time low in Grossenhain.

I could see that Mätzig was finding it increasingly difficult to control himself and intervened quickly with a pointed reference to the clock. Lotte Kühn turned to Lohagen and suggested that he, as Chairman of the Party in Saxony, bore a considerable responsibility for what she called my "errors". A bit of self-criticism seemed indicated. I could not resist the impulse to interrupt at that point and remind her that, if it had not been for the protection given her by the Central Committee's ruling on its members, she would have been pilloried, not Lohagen. She pretended to ignore that, but I knew from the tightening of her lips that it had registered.

Lohagen, of course, agreed to do public penance, but I think everyone there, with the sole exception of Lotte Kühn, despised him. What followed would have seemed squalid and degrading to any outside observer who knew the real circumstances; it seemed so to me and many other Party members in that hall; yet it is that commonplace practice of the Communist world known as "spontaneous self-criticism". Ernst Lohagen rose, as soon as the Conference was resumed, and not only identified himself and the Secretariat in Dresden with the ideological mistakes I had allegedly committed but agreed that Lotte Kühn's charges of immorality were justified. I got up at once and left the hall. I felt numb with disillusionment and despair. If Lohagen had crawled on his stomach for the sake of the Party, then I might have forgiven him, but I knew it was before Walter and Lotte Ulbricht he was crawling, before two of the most ruthless and unprincipled opportunists, to whom the Party and its doctrines were mere grist to the mill of their personal ambitions.

I was followed out by the leader of the steelworkers' delegation, by Rudi Hoffmann, my Deputy, and by Mätzig. All three had been present at the meeting the previous day when Sorgers' charges of immorality against me were torn to shreds. They urged me to let them return to the Conference and expose Lohagen.

"With what object?" I asked.

"Lohagen will be hounded out of the hall."

I had no doubt of that, but, as I tried to impress upon them, that was just the sort of genuinely spontaneous action that the Ulbrichts and their supporters in Berlin would pounce on as an instance of counter-revolutionary action. At the first Party Conference eleven months before, in January, 1949, Ulbricht had finally established himself as the most powerful man in East Germany with the formation of a nine-member Politbüro, which reduced the Central Committee to a mere consultative body. Ulbricht remained a member of both. Yet what these three were suggesting was a declaration of war on Ulbricht.

Again it was Mätzig who admitted sadly that I was right. And by now I was calm enough to realize that I too must go back into the hall. When I returned to my seat, Lohagen leant over and asked anxiously where I had been. I told him in a furious whisper that, unless he wanted me to wring his neck before the assembled delegates, a sight most of them would enjoy, he would be well advised not to talk to me again.

At the end of the Conference Lotte Kühn had the cool effrontery to offer me her hand. I ignored it.

The next two days and nights marked a turning-point in my life. I spent them at my desk at home, wrestling with doubts and reservations and bitter reproaches. Not one of the accusations against me had a grain of truth in it: that much I knew for certain. But had I chosen the right course at the Conference? If I was convinced—as indeed I was—that Ulbricht and his wife were trampling the basic principles of the Party underfoot simply because they saw in me a threat to their own personal power, then surely I should have taken up the challenge. No, the answer to that was simple: not merely my own fate but that of the others who would have supported me was at stake.

The course I had chosen was the only possible one in the circumstances. But was it not, in fact, the Party as such that was being crushed in me? Our very real achievements since the end of the war in the social and economic spheres must pale into insignificance beside a political dictatorship—comparable in its essentials with the Nazi regime. The thought that we might even then be in the process of turning full circle within five years of the destruction of the Nazis filled me with horror. Fortunately I knew that, powerful as Ulbricht was, there were others in high places in East Berlin, particularly Ackermann, Zaisser and Herrnstadt, the editor in chief of the Party newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, who would oppose any attempt at a personal dictatorship.

(All three were disgraced in 1953, following the June riots. Ackermann was expelled from the Central Committee and is today in charge of the Film Department of the Ministry of Culture. Zaisser and Herrnstadt were both expelled from the Party, the former to disappear from sight, the latter to engage on research work in some remote corner of the Zone.)

On November 9th Frolow called to summon me to the Commandant, who asked me for my account of what had happened at the Conference. When I had finished, he swore that something would be done. In fact, however, there was comparatively little he could do now, for a month before the "Soviet Zone of Germany" had been turned into the "German Democratic Republic", and two days after that interview the Soviet Military Administration became the Soviet Control Commission. It was an ironical coincidence that, at the very moment when I seemed in need of Soviet assistance, the subservience of the Party to the Soviet authorities, against which I had always fought, should have come to an end. But, as I pointed out to the Commandant, the last thing I wanted was for him to intervene on my behalf. Not only did I think it wrong, as he already knew, for the Soviet authorities to interfere in internal Party affairs, but the effect in my particular case would be disastrous. The Bialek affair could only be settled between me and the Party.

The Commandant agreed but insisted on my seeing the

Soviet G.O.C. Saxony. He asked to see a copy of the speech which Lotte Kühn had attacked and, having read it, could find no trace of ideological errors in it. He then said he would have to report to his headquarters in Berlin. When I protested, he assured me that the report would not reach Ulbricht. He concluded with one of several warnings I was to receive within the next few days. He advised me strongly to remain well in the background for the next three or four years. For the time being there were certain powerful elements in the Party who would welcome any opportunity to get rid of me. They were not powerful enough simply to remove me but, unless I was very careful, they would find some pretext. And perhaps—here the General shrugged his shoulders—perhaps in three or four years' time things would have settled down.

Looking back now I can see how significant was the General's "perhaps", for every moderate or near-moderate in East Germany has been either liquidated, rendered harmless or forced to flee to the West.

But even then, in late 1949, I could see the writing on the wall. The sickening conviction was beginning to grow on me that Ulbricht and his clique must succeed, as Hitler and his clique had done. For every man who had the courage to say "No" to them, there were thousands ready and even eager to say "Yes". Even I was forced for a time to submit, but that nadir of my life had not quite come yet.

I went from the Soviet Headquarters in Dresden straight to Lohagen's office. I was determined to tell him in no uncertain terms exactly what I thought of him. I did not mince my words. Lohagen, who was a craven coward, sat white-faced till I had finished, then stammered out his excuses. As I turned and walked out, Schliebs, Lohagen's Personnel chief, took me by the arm and led me into his office, closing the door behind him. He then proceeded, in his gruff, kindly way, to give me a lecture.

My assault on Lohagen had achieved nothing. But that was not the only stupid thing I had done. I had gone out of my way to antagonize Ulbricht and his wife in Berlin, exposing, or threatening to expose, their protégés Fischer and Mielke. I

should have kept my mouth shut. But, not content with that, I had committed two unforgivable sins in my next post in Grossenhain: I had exposed two more protégés of Ulbricht's, Dietrich and Sorgers, and I had run my district so efficiently that people began to talk about it elsewhere. There were times when it was advisable to keep out of the limelight, even if it meant doing one's job badly.

What could I possibly say in reply? Only that I had never been, and would never be, an opportunist. I was heartily sick of compromise and intrigue. My only ambition now was to become an ordinary worker in one of the local factories among people with simple down-to-earth inhibitions and problems.

Schliebs roared with laughter. Quite apart from the fact that the Party would never allow me to work in a district where I had become known as a Party official, my training and experience had given me a scarcity value, which even my "disgrace" had not destroyed. And my future had, apparently already been decided. I was to be First Secretary of a new Party organization dealing specifically with the coalminers of Saxony.

In normal circumstances I would have leapt at the job, for I knew that the miners were one of the most refractory elements in East Germany from the Party point of view. But I had no intention of allowing myself to be kicked upstairs. If I was regarded as too unsound, ideologically and morally, to hold the post of District First Secretary, then how could I conceivably be fitted for a more responsible post? No, I could not accept another official assignment, till the Party had taken proceedings against me and agreed to take proceedings against Lotte Kühn.

I could see that Schliebs was beginning to lose patience.

"Don't talk a lot of damned nonsense," he snapped. "The Party will never take proceedings against you, and, if you think any action's going to be taken against Lotte Kühn, you're stark, staring mad."

Perhaps I was, but I was determined to go to the Personnel Department in Berlin and demand an official investigation into the charges Lotte Kühn had made against me and also into her reasons for making them.

Schliebs' last words to me were:

"You'll have to give in, Robert."

When my former Deputy in Breslau, Heidenreich, who was now a senior Personnel official in the Central Committee, also warned me that I was banging my head against a stone wall, I began to taste defeat. He was not just a colleague whom I knew fairly well but a personal friend, whom I had helped out of trouble. Now the roles were reversed. The circumstances, however, were very different. Heidenreich had fallen foul of the Russians at a time when they were still possessed by hate and a lust for revenge. Five years had passed since then, and yet here was I being hounded, with the same malicious hate, by my own Party comrades. Circumstances had changed but not men or emotions.

Heidenreich, like Schliebs, pleaded with me to bow to the inevitable. He confessed that he had had ample opportunity, since he settled in East Berlin, to observe the Party leaders at work and he regarded most of them as crooks and blackguards. But—he gave that shrug of the shoulders which I had come to expect—what could he do? The only realistic policy was to close one eye, sometimes even both eyes, and wait for the time when the crooks and blackguards would be sent packing.

How many compatriots of mine had uttered these very words in the 1930's, when Hitler and his gang were in power? To hear them now from Heidenreich, for whom I had always felt the greatest affection and admiration, was particularly galling. I knew, on the other hand, that it was hopeless for me to try and talk him out of this abject self-accommodation. I contented myself with the bitter comment that, if only the Party members who appeared to sympathize with me had the courage to support me, then Ulbricht would find himself in a very awkward position. But lack of civic courage has always been the dictator's strongest weapon.

Of course the predictions of Schliebs, Heidenreich and others were fulfilled to the letter; through their spineless inaction, they themselves were shaping my future. I called on the head of the Personnel Branch of the Party and demanded, in accordance with the Party statutes, that an investigation be made into my alleged crimes. A number of questions were asked, notes were

taken, and I was assured that the matter would now be referred to the Party Control Committee. That was the last I heard of it.

I returned to Grossenhain determined to find manual work in a factory. The Labour Office refused to accept my application. I explored every possible avenue, but with the same negative result. After four weeks my slender resources were exhausted. My salary as Party District Chairman had been considerably less than that of a skilled worker and I had few savings. Since then Party salaries have been trebled.

I was almost at the end of my tether, for even public assistance was denied me, when the Soviet Political Officer from Dresden, Lieutenant-Colonel Reizin, called on me. He offered me the job of Director of one of the large Soviet-owned industrial concerns, which at that time still covered the major part of East Germany's industrial output. I was touched by his kindness and flattered by his confidence in me. That made it all the more difficult for me to explain why I could not accept. However despicably certain of my colleagues had behaved towards me, I still felt a deep sense of loyalty to the Party as I envisaged it and to the rank and file members, who were for me its essence. But apart from that, and this I did not feel bound to tell Reizin, I had no intention of taking refuge with the Russians.

Reizin's departure was one of the most embarrassing moments of my life. Having assured me that, if I changed my mind, the offer would still be open, he tried to press a bundle of hundred mark notes into my hand. He was obviously hurt and, I think, genuinely bewildered, when I refused them, but we finally parted on the best of terms and, once downstairs, he left the money with my landlady. It covered all my arrears of rent.

A few days later came a summons to Party headquarters in Dresden. I knew that a decision had been reached, but what would it be? An ultimatum or a reprieve?

It was Schliebs, not Lohagen, who received me, and he came straight to the point.

"Robert, the Secretariat has decided to offer you a choice between three posts. If you refuse them, you will be reported

to the Central Committee for a grave breach of Party discipline. You know what that means. You'll be flung out."

It is difficult to explain in words exactly what the threat of expulsion meant to me. The Party had become throughout the years my way of life, the only one I knew. I had fought and suffered for it as few men fight and suffer for any cause, much less for one that they have made their own. Sitting in Schliebs' office that day I was conscious of nothing but the threat to my survival. I had no doubt that, having expelled me, they would render me harmless. I knew too much to be allowed to escape or to roam about at liberty. But that did not enter into my calculations at all. For me the crucial, the mortal blow would be expulsion, and I could not take it.

"All right," I said, "I give in. You knew I would give in, didn't you?"

Schliebs nodded.

"Yes. The Party can do without you in the last resort, but you can't do without the Party."

The first of the three posts offered me Schliebs had mentioned at our last interview: First Secretary of a new Party organization for the coalmining industry. The second was a factory post in Leipzig. The third was as senior Party official in the locomotive works at Bautzen. I knew of it. Both from the political and from the production viewpoint it had been one of East Germany's failures. I plumped for it without a moment's hesitation.

THE "L.O.W.A." (Lokomotiv- und Waggonfabrik) Bautzen is one of the so-called V.E.B.s (Volkseigene Betriebe) or Nationalized industries. When the Soviet authorities confiscated the major part of East Germany's industry in 1945, the ostensible purpose was to expropriate "Nazi activists and armament manufacturers". But the real motive became clear in June, 1946, when it was announced that certain industrial concerns had been taken over by the Soviet military administration and were now Soviet property, "by virtue of the reparation claims of the U.S.S.R.". Some idea of the enormous reparations extracted from East Germany can be gained from the fact that these S.A.G. concerns employed about a quarter of the industrial labour force in the Soviet Zone and, more important still, covered its most important products. The entire production of uranium, nitrogen, synthetic rubber, sheet copper and aluminium, oxalic acid, and formaldehyde, for example, was in the hands of the Russians, to say nothing of other branches of industrial production which were virtually monopolized by them. In 1953 the last of these were officially handed back to the East German Republic, but much of the output is still directed to the Soviet Union at preferential prices.

The first act of restoration came in 1948, when some 3,000 factories were handed over to the East German authorities and were nationalized. By the end of 1950 these V.E.B.s numbered over 4,000 and employed about half East Germany's industrial labour force.

So the Russians and the Soviet Zone government between

them were the employers of the great majority of factory-workers in the Zone. Private ownership was—and is—confined to small factories producing unessential goods, and producing them under constant handicaps.

As Cultural Director of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen, a position I took over on January 1st, 1950, I was immediately subordinate to the Works Director. My function was to organize not only the political activities of the workers but also to increase output by stimulating competition and activism. But I was also responsible to the District Secretary of the S.E.D. I had already met Paul Fröhlich, when he was junior to me in the Dresden administration; now the rôles were reversed, and I knew that Fröhlich would make the most of it. Today he is First Secretary of the S.E.D. in Leipzig and a member of the Central Committee.

Fröhlich painted a gloomy picture. The Bautzen district was "riddled" with Catholics and agents of the West German Social Democrats. The Locomotive Works had become a sort of breeding-ground. The morale of the workers was low. The Works Director, formerly a skilled foundryman, had failed to assert himself, but he was the best available.

Fröhlich concluded with a typical warning.

"Don't forget that I'm First Secretary in this district. If you bear that in mind, we ought to get on all right."

I assured him that I knew how to behave myself, but I made a mental resolution to keep out of his way as much as possible.

My next call was on the Works Director, Wagner, a short, stocky man with a face like a spaniel. He showed me my office and suggested a meeting of Directors and Managers in an hour's time.

A nationalized concern in East Germany has an imposing hierarchy of officials. Immediately under the Works Director come the Technical Director or Chief Engineer, the Cultural Director and the Sales (Kaufmännisch) Director. There are, of course, a Chief Accountant, a Personnel Manager, and a Production Manager, but another key official is the Planning Manager. The year's output of any given V.E.B. is worked out

in advance by a special Commission, which makes its calculations globally. The amount of rolling stock required from the Zone as a whole is distributed over the various workshops and it is up to each individual Planning Manager, with the help of all his colleagues but in particular of the Cultural Director, to step up production sufficiently to fulfil the plan. The Plan, in fact, is always several steps ahead of actual production. The leeway is made up by means of organized competition between workshops or between workbenches. It is, of course, a method that is impossible to defend from a Marxist viewpoint, but the Stakhanovite system in Russia or in the satellite States has always been represented as a transitional phenomenon, which does not lead to the formation of a new class. That the latter is true I have explained earlier; the number of activists in East Germany—and of Stakhanovites in Russia—is legion. But the principle of organized competition and activism has become an inherent part of the Soviet and satellite system.

With one exception, the Sales Director, all the managerial staff of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen were Party members. The shop steward was also there. As the local representative of the only Trades Union organization permitted in East Germany, the Free German Trades Union Council, he was also a Party man. The Party Secretary in the L.O.W.A. Bautzen was a woman.

After I had been introduced, the meeting proceeded to business, and I had an opportunity of studying the people with whom I now had to work. It was soon clear that Wagner, the Works Director, was a weak character, who was at daggers drawn with the Technical Director and completely under the thumb of the domineering Party Secretary, Miss Jacob. She had obviously appropriated most of Wagner's authority, and I soon realized that the Personnel Manager, the Sales Director and the Trades Union representative were also intent upon offloading as much responsibility as possible on to her. She was the Party. The very word seemed to paralyse them.

I witnessed the effect as soon as I began a tour of the plant. The floor of the welding shop was littered with grey-brown sticks about a foot long, which crumbled like sand under

my feet. I said to Rossow, the shop-steward, who was showing me round:

"I'm not much of a technician, but aren't these welding electrodes we were trampling on?"

Rossow nodded gloomily.

"That's right. We've tried to get the men not to throw them away till they're properly used, but they can't be bothered. Only about one in every six is properly used."

"What do these things cost?"

From his reply I calculated that several hundred marks were being swept up off the floor every day and thrown on the rubbish heap. That was only one instance of the shocking carelessness and inefficiency I noticed during my first tour. A factory with some 1,600 workers could not afford faults of that kind.

I gained the same alarming impression of the administration offices. To begin with, 350 office-workers for a labour-force of 1,600 was out of all proportion, even taking into account the large construction office with almost a hundred technicians and engineers. They, incidentally, gave me one of the coldest receptions I have ever received in my life. It was beginning to dawn on me that, whether this new post had been intended as a punishment for my past misdeeds or whether I had myself accepted it as a form of penance for my capitulation, I was certainly in for a rough time.

Within a week of my arrival the trouble began. It started with graffiti on the walls of three workshops: "Look out for Bialek, the Political Commissar"; "Bialek the bloodhound is here" and so on. A few days later came the first anonymous letter. Remembering the scurrilous rumours that had been circulated about me in Grossenhain before I arrived, I had my suspicions that this might not necessarily be the work of "reactionary" elements. But there was nothing I could do except bide my time and try to concentrate on my job. Heaven knows, there was enough to do!

I waited four weeks, keeping my eyes and ears open, attending every managerial meeting, before I decided to make myself heard. I think it was the sight of Wagner feebly defending himself against a joint attack by Ruth Jacob and the shop-

steward that finally made me lose patience. I told them that, in my view, they were tilting at windmills when they attacked this or that element in the factory as reactionary. If by "reactionary" they meant criminally inefficient, then they themselves were the reactionaries. I quoted the managerial meetings as a case in point. They took place every other day; they always lasted several hours and sometimes most of the day. Resolutions were passed only to be ignored or even reversed a week or two later, without anyone noticing it. There was never an agenda. In fact, each meeting was merely an opportunity for certain people to air their non-existent authority, and for others to vent their personal spites or grievances. It was little wonder that the factory had become a shambles.

At this point Ruth Jacob seemed to sense what was coming but I went on doggedly and she subsided. I noticed how that little incident impressed the others. But they did not conceal their satisfaction as they listened to the next part of my discourse.

I regarded it as quite pointless and even inconsistent for the Party to be officially represented at these meetings. The Party was not there to give orders but to supervise, criticize and make recommendations. If the advice of the Party was needed on any specific problem, then Fräulein Jacob could be approached, but the actual day-to-day running of the factory was none of her business.

My final point was the most important. I had been looking into the salaries of our so-called "reactionary intelligentsia", the technical staff who had been blamed for undermining the morale of the workers. I found to my horror that skilled engineers with a lifetime of training and experience behind them were getting less than the average worker. I had discovered that the Assistant Chief Engineer was living with his wife and two children in one room. Why had the Party or Trades Union representative done nothing to obtain a living-wage for these men?

There was no answer to that. The first reaction came from the Technical Director, Schramm, who banged his fist on the table and proclaimed:

"Thank God somebody's had the guts to speak out at last. I agree with every word Comrade Bialek has said."

Ruth Jacob broke in with a furious tirade, in which she accused me of spying. But, she warned, the Party's position was unassailable.

Neither point was a particularly intelligent one. If I, as the Party-appointed Cultural Director, had been spying, then every Party official who came to inspect the factory was a spy. And, as for the unassailable position of the Party, that was exactly the line the Nazis had adopted. The first essential was an efficient factory, even if every worker in it was a fanatical Roman Catholic. But the chances were that, if the men were producing the goods and being well paid for their work, she would find her work a great deal easier.

After the meeting I had a long talk with Wagner in his office. I very soon gathered that he, like so many others, had been completely mesmerized by the spectre of the Party, especially because he was an old Social Democrat who had followed his leaders into the S.E.D. but knew nothing of Marxism and was acutely conscious of his lack of knowledge. I tried to convince him that the qualification for a Works Director was not theoretical knowledge but practical experience. He finally agreed to hold the managerial conferences once a week instead of every other day, to restrict each conference to a prearranged agenda and to a duration of one and a half hours, and to exclude Fräulein Jacob and the Personnel Manager, who was subordinate to me. All this seemed elementary to me but how many factories in East Germany were—and still are—being run by men who had not even a superficial knowledge of administration and who allowed themselves to be completely cowed by the local Party representative!

Ruth Jacob did not take kindly to defeat. A few weeks later she was found one night on the roadside outside Bautzen drunk. She was expelled from the Party. But before long she was reinstated and promoted. A tearful act of self-criticism can work wonders.

Before long I found myself wishing that Ruth Jacob had stayed the course, for she was succeeded by a former Social

Democrat with the improbable name of Ambrosius May, who seemed determined to be more Communist than the Communists. Unfortunately he was abysmally stupid into the bargain. Anyone less likely to "convert" the reactionary workers of Bautzen I could not imagine. When I remonstrated with Fröhlich, he gave a delighted grin. His sole problem, it appeared, had been to find a niche for May, who had made himself both unpopular and burdensome in his previous post. So he had been shuffled off into the biggest industrial concern in the district!

After meeting with such cynical irresponsibility in a senior Party official, I was hardly surprised to find it in his subordinates. At the beginning of April the Chief Accountant asked for a special meeting to be called, as he had an important announcement to make. He had just been notified of a drastic change in the financial plan for the year 1950. The one million marks profit originally required had now been increased to two and a half. It was a typical example of arbitrary economic planning by politicians. No less typical, however, was our Chief Accountant's solution to this problem. Starting off from the assumption that the L.O.W.A. Bautzen could not possibly increase its output by 150 per cent, he had concluded that at least 500 workers and employees would have to be dismissed and that the remainder could not expect any improvement in their wages or salaries.

If one disregarded the hardship imposed on several hundred families, it seemed easy, but I had a feeling that the financial plan would be fulfilled at the expense of the production plan, which in fact called for more not fewer workers. And the effect of 500 dismissals on the morale of the population would be shocking. As I pointed out, there were several ways in which money could be saved without lowering production. On the contrary, some economies would improve production. The most obvious example was the enormous number of welding electrodes which were wasted. Here alone a saving of half a million marks could be effected. Then, there was the Norm racket. Workers had been "saving up" hours of work, ostensibly in excess of their output norms, when they had not even been in the factory. No one had so far dared to challenge them, for fear of having

his head smashed. And yet, at the same time, one million marks had been set aside for competitive bonuses, of which more than seventy-five per cent had remained untouched in 1950. One thing was clear to me: the system of fixing Norms on the basis of special exhibitions by hand-picked activists was fundamentally wrong. The only way to increase production was to offer the men more money for more work.

My first move was to summon to my office a sixty-year old workman called Reinig, who, I knew, commanded the respect of all his mates. I explained the position to him. If we were to avoid the dismissal of 500 men, we must make economies and we must step up production. I offered him an immediate raise from 350 to 500 marks a month if he would act as a sort of go-between and help me launch a piece-work campaign. Every economy effected in the workshops would be rewarded with a percentage bonus, every suggestion for improving working conditions or increasing output would also be rewarded according to the rates laid down by the Labour Laws, and production in excess of the output quota or norm would also be paid at a fixed rate.

Reinig accepted my proposition but warned me that the workers distrusted me. If this was just another wild-cat scheme, he wouldn't give much for my chances of survival. For example, where was the money to come from, he demanded bluntly. I was able to reassure him that a million marks were there in a special fund for the earning.

The effect was sudden and startling. Now that there was money to be made by using raw materials sparingly and keeping the workshops tidy, the L.O.W.A. Bautzen became a different place almost overnight. And before long morale began to improve accordingly. I set up a special office with two engineers and two draughtsmen who did nothing but consider and try out suggestions for improving production. By the end of 1950 close upon 1,500 such suggestions had been put forward, of which over a thousand proved practicable and meant a saving of almost a million marks.

The technical staff became, if anything, more hostile as conditions improved in the workshops. I made detailed

enquiries into their salaries and living conditions and was appalled. By the end of the year I had raised the average salary by 50 per cent and, with the help of the Housing authorities in Bautzen, succeeded in finding most of them decent accommodation. Here too the effect on morale was incalculable. The invisible "Iron Curtain" between technicians and workers gradually disappeared, as the factory acquired a life and individuality of its own. At the beginning of 1950 there were ten activists in the L.O.W.A. Bautzen, all in the workshops; by the end of the year there were 382 in all branches of the works.

It must be admitted, of course, that 1950-51 were the peak years in East Germany. Prices came down and the general standard of living improved. In the autumn of 1950 a new regulation was issued by the government, whereby activists had to be chosen by their fellow-workers. The bitterness and contempt which Adolf Henncke had inspired in his mates was thereby removed. For the time being, activism was more than respectable, it was desirable. And, as the grim hardship of the war—and immediate post-war—years slipped behind, inevitably the East German government and the S.E.D. gained in prestige. The workers began to feel that the V.E.B.s really had been handed over to them and were their property. Their whole psychological approach underwent a change; they behaved like bosses.

One small incident from that period sticks in my mind. One morning after a particularly heavy night's work I walked through the factory barely conscious of my surroundings. I was busy milling over in my mind several ideas left over from the night before. During the morning break a workman came on the public address system demanding to know why the Cultural Director had not seen fit to pass the time of day with him and his colleagues. As I had been instrumental in installing the public address system, I could hardly complain.

Unfortunately as the prestige of the Party grew, the non-Party man became something of a pariah. I remember in particular the case of Herbert Haase.

Towards the end of April, 1950, I came back from a trip to

Berlin to find a stormy meeting being held in the canteen of the "Lackiererei" (lacquer-shop). The shop-steward, Rossow, and the Personnel Manager, Hultsch, were both there together with about fifty workmen. As I entered the canteen, Hultsch caught sight of me and said hurriedly:

"I take it then that most of the men are in favour of dismissing this man."

I asked Rossow what it was all about. The discussion was suspended while he told me. Preparations were under way for the First of May celebrations and Haase was one of the men detailed to carry a red flag in the procession. Haase's reply was that he would be "damned if he was going to carry any red rag". His mates—according to Rossow—immediately reported him to the shop-steward and demanded his dismissal. The Personnel Manager had agreed.

I asked the foreman of the "Lackiererei" for his views. With a defiant glance at Hultsch, he replied bluntly that there was no question of the majority wanting Haase sacked. He was one of his best men.

I looked at Haase, who I now knew to be a non-Party man. He apologized for having lost his temper and offending some of his mates with the phrase "red rag", but he noticed that non-Party men were always detailed to carry the red flag on occasions like this. It seemed to him that the right people to carry the flag were the people who believed in it, the Party members.

They were bold, courageous words, which, I noticed, aroused not a murmur of protest from Haase's mates but a few admiring grins. Only Hultsch scowled angrily. And, returning to my office after I had smoothed things over by endorsing what Haase had said, I found Hultsch at my elbow reproaching me bitterly with having reinstated an enemy of the working class. Haase had left a deep impression on me, something that Hultsch had never done. I told him curtly not to be a fool. Haase's political affiliations were of secondary importance. He was an excellent worker and therefore worth cultivating, not sacking. As a matter of fact, following that incident, I did cultivate Haase and finally interested him in the Kowaljow method.

The Russian engineer Kowaljow had established, after watching five skilled workmen engaged in the same production-process, that each one had developed an individual style of his own. By filming each man at work, he was able to pinpoint weak spots in each style and to eliminate them. Haase applied the Kowaljow method to such good effect that the L.O.W.A. Bautzen saved some 40,000 marks in 1950 and Haase, the "enemy of the workers", became a "Hero of Labour" and a Party member.

The L.O.W.A. Bautzen finished the year 1950 with a clear profit of four and a half million marks, two million more than was required by the Plan. 45 per cent of this belonged, by law, to the workers and 600,000 marks were distributed in time for Christmas 1950.

With the beginning of a new year, however, came the inevitable slowing-down of production. No raw materials were supplied and no orders distributed till the overall production plan for the Zone had been worked out. For the first six weeks of each year the L.O.W.A. Bautzen—and the same applied to all other industrial units in East Germany—was only working at half its normal speed. Workers sat around playing cards, did menial jobs or generally killed time till the Plan arrived. The cause of this annual delay was not shortage of raw materials but the cumbersome process through which the Plan had to pass before it was finally accepted by the People's Congress. The production quota of every State-owned factory in East Germany is fixed by legislation! The effect of this delay was to produce a twelve-months plan with only ten months left in which to fulfil it.

In spite of that, the year 1951 was a good one for East Germany's industrial production, probably the peak year. And the L.O.W.A. Bautzen had become something of a pioneer. The resultant publicity, in which my name was frequently mentioned, was not an unmixed blessing. I found myself remembering the Soviet General's advice to me, before I left Dresden, and realized that I was back in the limelight again. How long would I be left in peace?

ONE of the main handicaps under which the economy of East Germany has always had to work is the enormous amount of time lost through organized Party activities. The number of man-hours sacrificed to political lectures and demonstrations is far in excess of the losses incurred by British industry through strikes. A typical example of this was the World Youth Festival in East Berlin in August, 1951. Workers all over the Soviet Zone were given fourteen days' holiday to attend the Festival and only a skeleton staff remained behind to keep the wheels turning.

Those actually taking part in the Festival, about a million "young" people many of whom would never see their twenties again, were conveyed to and from Berlin in three batches. I received instructions to lead a detachment of 10,000 for the last stage of the Festival. But no sooner had I arrived in the Soviet sector than I was told that new orders were awaiting me. I was now to take charge of a Special Commando of picked youths, who were housed in a camp just outside Berlin. I found the camp. It was like an army barracks, to which one only gained access with a special pass.

I had still not received any clear instructions when Honnecker, the leader of the Free German Youth, arrived. He made a fiery speech, in which he attacked, in particular, the Lord Mayor of West Berlin, Reuter, and the Social Democrat leader, Schumacher. At one of Honnecker's sentences I pricked up my ears:

"These gentlemen are always inviting the F.D.J. to visit

West Berlin. I hope Herr Reuter will not complain if we accept his invitation."

I got Honnecker on one side after his speech and asked him what was in the wind. He merely laughed and assured me that I would know soon enough.

Three days later he was back, this time to announce the "visit" to West Berlin for midday. The various group-leaders were summoned to a briefing conference. We were to march in closed ranks to the Sector boundary then to break up into groups of five, three boys and two girls. I at once asked if it was necessary for women and girls to take part in this demonstration, as I could not imagine the West Berlin police standing by with their truncheons idle. Honnecker ruled me sharply out of order and asked me afterwards what the devil I meant by making such a stupid interjection. Even if I did reckon with clashes with the police, there was no need to express my fears openly. The object of this whole demonstration was beginning to dawn on me.

Shortly before midday, when we were all assembled in the Treptow Park in East Berlin, Honnecker came racing up in his car and called out final instructions to me. I was to march at the head of the 10,000. Several advance groups had already entered the Western sectors. There would probably be clashes (he now admitted) but, if we kept the women and children in the middle, we should get through.

Before I could make any reply to this farrago of criminal nonsense, he was gone. I decided to lead the demonstration at a slow tempo in the hope that Honnecker and his colleagues would have second thoughts. I confess, however, that I was not over-optimistic.

We were about five minutes' march from the border when we were met by groups of Free German Youth running towards us. One of them shouted to me not to go any further. The West Berlin police were waiting at the border with rubber truncheons and hoses.

My second wife, an official in the Free German Youth, was marching beside me, at the head of the column.

"What the hell am I to do?" I muttered furiously. "I only hope they've sealed off the sector-boundary."

In the column were quite a number of young children. When I thought of the risk to which they were being subjected, I felt an overpowering desire to get my hands on Honnecker's throat.

As the boundary came in sight, a group of People's Police officers approached to meet us. A Captain warned me to stop, as the border had been closed and strong forces of West Berlin police had been brought up. If I continued, it was on my own responsibility.

So much for police authority, I thought bitterly. I pointed out that the responsibility was not mine but Honnecker's. The reply, however, did not altogether satisfy me, and I halted the column and began to walk the last twenty yards alone. I realized at once that this particular demonstration was a fiasco before it began. But Honnecker, who drove up at that moment, thought otherwise. His face was positively glowing with triumph as he mentioned the casualties already suffered. The propaganda value was tremendous.

If his idea of propaganda was to mount a demonstration at half-cock and expose young children to clashes with police, I retorted angrily, then he'd better start growing up. He flushed and told me to keep my mouth shut. He had something better to do than argue with me.

The "something better" was a speech to the assembled youth, praising them for their courage and screaming abuse at the West Berlin police. But, despite his screaming, I was one of the few among these many thousands who could hear him, for two American helicopters chose that moment to fly low over our heads and drop dummy bombs in the neighbouring ruins. The noise was indescribable.

By then, of course, I had realized that the S.E.D. had organized this Youth "assault" on West Berlin in the certain knowledge that the West Berlin police would seal off the boundary. But Honnecker and his friends had two distinct aims in view: to achieve sufficient casualties to serve their propaganda purposes and to frighten off the hundreds of Free German Youth who had already paid casual visits to West Berlin from returning or from inducing others to follow their example. The West Berlin authorities had gone out of their way to be

hospitable to the casual visitors. This demonstration was the S.E.D.'s reply.

The problems of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen seemed refreshingly straightforward and untainted after the wretched affair of August 15th in Berlin, but the illusion was short-lived. On the face of it we had the 1951 Plan well under control. Articles were still appearing in the Press on the remarkable recovery the factory had made, but it was not until December, 1951, that one of these articles made me sit up and take notice. It appeared in the *Neue Weg*, the organ for Party officials, and contained a sharp attack on the Party District Headquarters for not applying the lessons learned by the L.O.W.A. Bautzen to other factories. Although I had no particular quarrel with the sentiments expressed, it was with a mixture of anger and dismay that I noticed not only the editor's but also my own name at the end of the article. I rang the paper and protested vehemently against this misuse of my name but without result. I thought no more of it till the first group of observers appeared in response to the article.

At the beginning of 1951 Paul Fröhlich had been transferred to Leipzig and replaced as First Secretary by Herbert Schmidt, a smooth, obnoxious character, who was subsequently discovered to be a former Gestapo Agent and was arrested. I took one glance at Schmidt's ten observers and made for the telephone. Three of them had been dismissed from the factory some months before for theft. I demanded their immediate removal. Schmidt refused on the grounds that no official charge had ever been made against them. I could feel my flesh creeping as I replaced the receiver. The article ostensibly signed by me in the official Party Journal and the return of three sacked men as observers could not possibly be coincidental. My worst fears were confirmed when I contacted the Party Secretary, Kurt John, who had succeeded the unhappy Ambrosius May. John was a former Social Democrat and master carpenter, simple and honest. He had already received reports from various workers which indicated that these were no ordinary observers. Some of them had apparently already gone out of their way to blacken my reputation.

In the next few days I noticed that the observers were spending a great deal of time with the Personnel Manager, Hultsch, who was also a member of the Party's District Committee and Control Commission.

The crisis came at the end of the financial year when the Chief Accountant announced a profit of more than a million marks over and above the Plan. I asked for 300,000 marks to be paid out to the workers as their legitimate share. This was done, after the accounts had been cleared by the Ministry in Berlin. But in February a special commission arrived from Berlin to make the startling announcement that, owing to unforeseen circumstances, our profit of a million marks must be changed to a deficit of over half a million. The Soviet Union had refused to meet claims from us totalling over one and a half million marks for last-minute changes and improvements which had not been included in the original orders.

I pointed out that these improvements had been made at the express wish of the buyer, namely the Soviet government, and should be paid for by it. Surely the East German government would make that clear!

The Chairman of the Commission agreed but, in case of failure, warned us to hold on to our excess profit. When I pointed out that his warning had come too late, as 75 per cent of the money had already been distributed among the workers, he made a wry face and declared the meeting closed.

At the end of the month Kurt John, the Party Secretary, was summoned to Schmidt's office in Bautzen, where he was informed that our production plan had only been 95 per cent fulfilled, not 121 per cent as the figures had showed. We had also failed to carry out the financial plan. And Schmidt concluded his shattering announcement with the enigmatic remark: "Robert knows about it."

If I knew anything at all it was that Schmidt would never have dared make such a statement without official backing and that I was once more under attack. Schmidt had virtually accused me of forging the production figures. That was a serious charge which carried a penalty of penal servitude. Even when I had gone through the figures with a fine-tooth comb

and found them quite correct, I did not feel greatly reassured.

A further hint that there was trouble ahead for me came at a Conference of District Party officials, at which Schmidt suddenly remarked, in winding up the Conference:

"A few individuals in the L.O.W.A. Bautzen have been leading the public and the Party up the garden path. The lid is going to blow off one of these days, and I shall be interested to see who's sitting on it."

Schmidt was undoubtedly making an oblique reference to our annual accounts. I decided to try to force him into the open. After consultation with the Works Manager, I asked for a meeting with the District Secretariat at which Schmidt would be cross-examined.

The meeting, which was held on March 8th, 1952, lasted for several hours. Schmidt revealed the source of his information: the Manager of the German Notenbank in Bautzen. It did not take long to prove that the Bank's figures were wrong, whether deliberately or not I cannot say. I therefore demanded that Schmidt publicly retract his accusations. He gave a cynical smile.

"The meeting has only just begun," he said.

He thereupon delivered a lengthy statement, which had clearly been carefully rehearsed and approved by higher quarters. It was an exposure of what he called the "Bialek Myth". His main contention was that I had built up for myself such a strong position in the L.O.W.A. Bautzen that the Party played a secondary role. If the workers had any grievance to air, it was to me not to the Party Secretary that they came. Even the Works Manager was constantly looking to me for advice and support instead of to the Party. A false order of priorities had been established.

It did not imply any overweening vanity on my part to recognize that there was more than a grain of truth in what Schmidt had said. I began my reply by agreeing with Schmidt that the Party should come first. But who was responsible for this false order of priorities? The Party itself. I had been the first to protest against the appointment of the incompetent

Ambrosius May in succession to the domineering Ruth Jacob. To no purpose. And, just as Ruth Jacob's disgrace was followed by promotion, so May had no sooner been removed from the L.O.W.A. Bautzen than he had also been kicked upstairs to the Chairmanship of the Party's District Control Commission. Yet both had failed completely to gain the confidence of the workers, much less exercise any influence over them. It was a staggering thought that incompetent and irresponsible people were being exposed and then reinstated all over the Zone merely because they had friends in high places. How could any Party hope to command the respect of its rank-and-file members so long as it was riddled with nepotism!

Schmidt's reply was the all-too-familiar "mea culpa" or self-criticism, which has become the stock Communist method of either setting up or disposing of a scapegoat. He and the Party admitted their guilt in giving me so much publicity and thereby contributing to the Bialek Myth. They had recognized their mistake and proposed to remedy it at once.

When one of the Party members from the factory urged him to be more specific, Schmidt's self-righteous complacency deserted him.

"Are you trying to defend Comrade Bialek?" he snarled. "If so, I would advise you to think again."

It seemed to me the time had come to take Comrade Schmidt by the horns. It was clear from the threatening tone he had adopted that he had powerful backing. Who was behind him? I demanded. Who had instructed him to make such completely unfounded accusations, first of all against the factory, then against me?

Before Schmidt could reply, John, the Party Secretary, rose to his feet. His face was pale and set, and his hands were trembling.

"I know what's behind all this," he shouted. "Comrade Bialek's to be got rid off at all costs. He seems to have done his job a bit too well for some people's liking. Comrade Schmidt started his campaign with me. He got me on one side and told me some hair-raising things about Robert Bialek. All in strict confidence, of course."

"You'll have to answer for not keeping your mouth shut," Schmidt warned him.

"Don't worry," retorted John. "I've answered for it already. To my conscience. I'm not going to play your dirty game, not against the man who put everything he had into the L.O.W.A. Bautzen and turned it from a muckheap into one of the best plants in East Germany. You can count me out."

"Very interesting," said Schmidt, as the old man sat down. "It seems that Comrade Bialek isn't the only one who needs a crack of the whip."

John leapt up from his chair so quickly that it crashed to the floor behind him.

"You little bastard, I've been thirty years in the working class movement and I'm not sitting down to that sort of talk." His voice was hoarse with rage. "If you're typical of the Party today, then it's time I got out."

He had taken his wallet out of his pocket and was fumbling amongst the papers in it. I suddenly realized that he was on the point of flinging his Party membership-book in Schmidt's face. That would have meant certain expulsion from the Party, which would have broken the old man's heart.

I jumped up, snatched the wallet out of his hands and seized him firmly by the shoulder.

"For God's sake, pull yourself together, Kurt," I urged him. "Don't lose control of yourself. That's exactly what he wants."

Another of his colleagues helped me lead him from the room and he gradually calmed down. The whole sorry tale came out now. Hultsch, the Personnel Manager, had apparently tried to spread ugly rumours about me in the factory. Without much success. Then came Schmidt's group of "observers". They too had not had much effect. So now it was the turn of the Party District Headquarters to weigh in.

I assured John, without much conviction in my own heart, that everything would turn out all right, and we went back to the Conference room. As the meeting had by now dragged on for several hours and as I wanted to avoid any further scenes, I proposed an adjournment. All my colleagues agreed and

Schmidt was prepared, for once, to bow to the majority. But, as we left, he delivered a parting shot.

"I don't want to threaten you, but those of you who have been supporting Comrade Bialek would be well advised to remember that you have wives and children to support."

That was the keynote in the interminable days and weeks that followed. The Party Committee of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen was under constant pressure for over a month. First there were meetings with the District Committee, then, when that failed, individual interviews. Each man was threatened with dismissal and complete penury for him and his family. Even under this mental torture only one man broke: the Works Manager, Wagner, who crossed over into the other camp. John had suffered a nervous breakdown and spent almost the entire period in bed.

The District Committee now decided—clearly on orders from higher authority—to carry the fight into the open. On April 29th, 1952, the East Saxon Party newspaper *Lausitzer Rundschau* published a full-page open letter to the Party Committee of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen. All the old calumnies were served up again, but this time they were made public knowledge. I immediately travelled up to Berlin and addressed myself to the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee. They advised me to see Herrnstadt of the *Neues Deutschland* and publish a reply. Unfortunately, Herrnstadt was not there. One of his editors promised to visit Bautzen within the next forty-eight hours to get a first-hand report. When several days had passed and he had not put in an appearance, I prepared a reply myself and sent a copy to every newspaper in the Zone. Not one was published. I subsequently learned that every newspaper editor in East Germany had received written instructions, signed by Ulbricht himself, not to print anything I wrote. An answer to the open letter by the L.O.W.A. Bautzen branch of the Party received the same treatment. But at least I now knew for certain who was the moving spirit.

The final phase of the struggle opened on April 17th, 1952, when the management of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen received an official communication from the government, which contained these crucial sentences:

"In view of the friendly relations it entertains with the government of the Soviet Union, the government of the German Democratic Republic has acceded to the Soviet government's request to cancel certain accounts from the L.O.W.A. Bautzen totalling over one and a half million marks. The Management of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen is herewith instructed to alter the balance for the year 1951 accordingly."

This simply meant that the workers of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen were to pay out of their own pockets for the government's cowardly refusal to stand up to the Russians. The Management protested that the Government's instructions were both unjust and impracticable. The reply was a summons about three weeks later to a meeting in Bautzen. The Director of the plant, the Party Secretary and myself found Schmidt and a government representative waiting for us.

Schmidt repeated the ultimatum; I gave him the by now familiar reply. Schmidt, obviously prepared for the argument that the bulk of the money had already been paid in bonuses to the workers, had an answer ready. The Central Committee had decided that the deficit must be made good out of the Director's Fund. This fund is another means of stimulating production, which was taken over from the Soviet Union. Calculated on a percentage of the total wage-packet of a state-owned factory, it is designed to provide the workers with special bonuses and with social and cultural amenities in proportion to their output. Strictly speaking, only the Works Director, in consultation with the Trades Union representative, can authorize expenditure from it. The L.O.W.A. Bautzen's fund for 1952 belonged, by right and by law, to the workers. What the Central Committee was suggesting, as I pointed out, was theft. Moreover, they would be cutting off their noses to spite their faces, for without bonuses and without improved amenities the men would simply not produce the goods. It was decided to refer the matter back to the government.

In the meantime the Party had shifted its attack from my colleagues to me. There was a diabolical shrewdness behind this change of tactics, for my second wife had given birth to a child. I knew that, in carrying the war against me into the

Press, Ulbricht and his henchmen had overstepped themselves, for, although every reply to the Open Letter had been stifled, the Central Committee was by no means unanimously on Ulbricht's side. So the personal approaches that were now made to me brought a slight sense of satisfaction. But that was nothing compared to the fresh doubts that came crowding in on me. I now had not only an ailing wife to support but also a child. All that was required of me was a confession that I had made mistakes and that the District Committee had not been entirely in the wrong. They were prepared to make confession as easy as they could for me and promised that, once it had been made, they would find me another and a better post elsewhere in the Zone. In this way both the Party's face and my future would be saved.

I took the problem to my wife and asked her what I should do. She did not hesitate for one moment.

"Do the decent thing. If you lose your self-respect, you'll lose my respect too."

20

As the Party Conference in the third week of May drew near, the pressure on me to capitulate was increased. I turned down all offers and refused to submit to threats.

Inevitably Schmidt opened the Conference with a reference to the Open Letter. Once again I exposed it as a tissue of lies. The final sentences of my speech, the text of which I have before me, were not likely to placate my enemies, but matters had gone much too far for conciliation.

"So long as the Party allows one of its members, however humble, to be publicly pilloried and abused without affording him any opportunity to defend himself, it cannot hope to gain the complete confidence of the masses. The Party leader in this district is sitting on the platform today: Herbert Schmidt. He has grossly misused his authority not only in originating the libellous reports about me but also in attempting to bring pressure to bear on my colleagues. Whatever the outcome of this dispute may be, and I don't rate my chances very high considering the nature of the opposition, I intend to fight to the last. Not because of any personal antagonisms but because I believe that, when the Party asks me to cheat and lie to the workers, it is in fact cheating and lying to itself. I have been asked, in the Party's best interests, to confess to mistakes I never made, the assumption being that the Party cannot afford to admit having made a mistake. Why not? Does membership of the Central Committee make a man less fallible than you or I? If so, then we must be breeding a hierarchy of saints. Being no saint myself, I prefer the company of honest, sincere fellow-sinners."

The laughter and applause that followed my speech and the stormy interruptions during Schmidt's reply left me in no doubt as to the feelings of the Conference, but I knew that, when the crucial moment came, Schmidt and his friends on the platform would find some means of suppressing the majority opinion. As it happened, I myself gave Schmidt his opportunity. My wife, who had not yet recovered from a difficult childbirth, suffered a slight relapse on the second morning of the Conference and I spent two vital hours at the hospital. When I arrived at the hall, the discussion was over and the election of new officials was well under way. The first item on the agenda, the Bialek Affair, had been referred back to the Party's Control Commission.

My final interview with Schmidt in the beginning of June revealed to what lengths Ulbricht was now prepared to go in order to prepare the ground for my expulsion from the Party. I was given my last chance: to make a public confession to the workers and employees of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen that I had been careless with their funds. If I agreed, then all would be forgotten and forgiven. (I had only his word for that!) If not, then he himself would tell the workers that I had misappropriated their money. I not only refused to make any false confession but warned him that I would be there to reply to any statement he might make.

I should have known, of course, that all pretence of fair play would now be dropped. When I arrived at the factory at the usual time the following morning, two policemen barred my way. They had received instructions from the District Committee of the Party not to let me through. Another quick visit to the Central Committee in Berlin proved as fruitless as the one before. Those who sympathized with me were too afraid to open their mouths.

On June 19th I received a notice of instant dismissal for having "absented myself from work without adequate excuse". The grim irony of it made me laugh. But not for long. For weeks all my attempts to find work were in vain. Finally I was reduced to accepting help from Party colleagues, who surreptitiously gave me money and food. I felt as if I was back in the under-

ground again, fighting against the Nazis, except that I had felt no sense of humiliation then.

All those who had openly supported me had either been removed from their jobs or transferred elsewhere. John was the first to be punished. Officials and members of the Party were forbidden to communicate with me and every factory in the Bautzen district had received orders not to employ me. At the same time I had been warned by the Party not to leave the district. Fortunately I at last succeeded in finding casual work on a farm, which tided me and my family over till the curtain went up on the last act.

On September 1st, 1952, came the notification of a special meeting of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen Party members on the 5th at 3 p.m. As most of the members lived some distance away and usually caught a train at 4.30, it was obviously to be a short meeting. I soon discovered, through one of my friends, that the most elaborate precautions had been taken to ensure that the only item on the agenda, the "Bialek Affair", was disposed of quickly and satisfactorily.

According to the Party statutes, I could only be expelled by the particular administrative branch to which I belonged, but the District Committee knew that most of my thirty-three colleagues would never vote for my expulsion. The entire Party membership of the plant, some 700 men, was therefore to be summoned. They were to be divided into groups and each group was to occupy reserved seats, so that the platform could identify any speakers who supported me. The group-leaders were summoned to a special briefing-conference on the eve of the meeting and instructed to warn the men that Bialek must be expelled and that anyone who opposed his expulsion would have to take the consequences.

When I entered the large hall of the L.O.W.A. Bautzen on the afternoon of September 5th, I found myself confronted by a dazzling array of Party talent. There were several representatives of the Central Committee, the entire Control Commission for Saxony as well as the District Control Commission and the District Committee.

The meeting was opened not by Schmidt but by a senior

member of the Land Control Commission, who, to my surprise, paid a brief tribute to my past achievements and expressed the hope that I would confess to my mistakes. It was over so quickly and so smoothly that I was taken unawares. I had expected a violent tirade, instead of which one final opportunity had been given me to escape judgment. So many others had done it before me. Why should I hesitate? Why should I shrink from a confession when a man like Anton Ackermann had set the example?

It was an impossible question to answer and it still is. If, faced with the choice between a formal statement of self-criticism and expulsion from the Party I had belonged to most of my life, I chose the latter, I know that I was no longer free to make the choice. The anger and disgust, that had been accumulating in me for months past, had conditioned me against surrender or even compromise as effectively as if I had been inoculated. Last but not least, I had my pride. But pride, in the Communist Party, is the prerogative of the few. It is one of the perquisites of power. Every act of self-criticism is, therefore, a tribute demanded of the performer and paid to the leader.

It did not take me long to give my reasons for refusing to own up to mistakes I had never committed, merely in order to cloak the shortcomings and corruption of the Party. As soon as I had returned to my seat, every man on the platform weighed in against me. Then a vote was called for. But the hall was already half empty and workers were still leaving while the vote was being taken. How many were hurrying off to catch their train, how many simply reluctant to vote I cannot say.

At the first vote, only about thirty hands were raised in favour of my expulsion but the Chairman intimated that the motion had been carried. There were shouts of indignant protest from the floor. The second vote showed about fifty in favour and thirty against, but there were still some three hundred men in the hall and abstentions were not permitted. Nevertheless, the Chairman again tried to declare the motion carried. Once more he was called to order. Then Schmidt rose and warned all present that anyone voting against my

expulsion would be voting against the Party. There were several catcalls and shouts of indignation but the final result was inevitable. One hundred and thirty-two out of over seven hundred Party members voted for my expulsion from the Party; twenty-two still had the courage to vote against it. Most of them were subsequently punished in some way or another.

My final exit seems, in retrospect, to have been almost melodramatic, but, as I flung my Party membership-book on the table in front of the Chairman and left the hall, I was conscious only of an overwhelming sense of bitterness and loss. There are moments in every man's life which can be foreseen as practical possibilities but remain incredible till they happen and sometimes even after they have happened. I remember walking out into the factory yard and pausing to talk for a few moments to a group of workmen, but I have no recollection of what was said. Nor do I remember walking from the factory to my flat. My memory only functions again as I am climbing the stairs and realize suddenly that my wife is still a member of the Party. They could make things very awkward for her now; they might even try to make her divorce me. It would not be by any means the first time the Party had set itself up as a moral arbiter.

In fact, however, it was my wife who shamed the Party into making some sort of reparation. I had sent in my appeal to the Control Commission in Berlin but weeks passed without any reply. I was not entitled to any form of public assistance. Once again it was only with the secret help of friends and occasional work as a farm labourer that we managed to keep body and soul together. And yet the Party's campaign of abuse still continued unabated. I was now branded as an "enemy of the Party and the Republic".

My wife was present at a Branch meeting when every word of abuse in the German language was flung at me. When the speaker had finished, my wife asked him if he knew Robert Bialek. He admitted that he had never met me. His speech had been provided by the District Headquarters.

My wife then told the other women present exactly what she thought of a Party that persecuted a defenceless man and even

deprived him of any means of livelihood for his family. I fully expected disciplinary action to be taken against her, but the opposite happened. The same Party official who had called for the crucial vote on my expulsion now intervened on my behalf. Thanks to his intervention and presumably qualms of conscience, I was offered a job in the Building Union of Bautzen.

I had no choice but to accept. Yet from the outset I was in a most invidious position. I was known either personally or by repute to all my new workmates as someone who had previously held highly responsible positions. Now I was not only an ordinary office-employee but was receiving little more than half the salary legitimately due to me. Moreover my situation was not made any easier by the fact that I was constantly meeting former colleagues from the L.O.W.A. Bautzen. Before long I received orders to leave my flat and find accommodation farther away from the L.O.W.A. Bautzen.

It was April, 1953, before I had any reaction to my appeal to the Central Control Commission in Berlin. I was summoned to appear before them on the 7th. Once again the honour of the Party was the main theme. The arguments, the blandishments, the threats were becoming depressingly familiar. The only novelty on this occasion was a woman in her middle thirties who confessed that the Party was everything to her. There was no sacrifice she would not make for it.

I could well believe it. She was one of the most dangerous types, a frustrated woman for whom the Party had become father, lover and husband all in one. She had sunk her whole identity in it. When it sinned, she would take the sin upon herself and wallow in it.

The discussion came to a sudden and unexpected end, when one of the inquisitors, who had so far remained silent, broke in abruptly with a sharp ultimatum. "The Party has no intention of giving ground. Any further discussion is useless."

It was his tone more than his words that got me on the raw. I pointed out that there never had been any discussion. The Party had admitted its mistakes in private but refused to admit them in public. I was to offer myself up as a scapegoat for the Party's inefficiency and cowardice. I preferred to stay outside it.

I knew at once that I had gone too far.

"Any more talk of that kind," said the Chairman curtly, "and you won't leave this building. All I have to do is press this bell."

It was the only time in all these months that I felt afraid. I knew that on every floor of the Central Committee building there were Security Police in plain blue suits and red ties waiting for just such an emergency as this. And at that moment nothing was so important to me as to return to my family.

I apologized. I suggested that they should give me time to think. They agreed. Ten minutes later I left the building with a tremendous sense of relief yet with a feeling of shame too. On the other hand, that moment of weakness, as I later realized, brought home to me the utter futility of carrying on the fight on their ground. They had the whole machinery of a totalitarian State at their disposal to quell any protest against my arrest.

In itself, however, the sudden awareness that I would never be allowed to live quietly outside the Party, that I was literally confronted with a choice between capitulation and liquidation would not have been sufficient to make me flee to the West. I could, if necessary, send my wife and child to her parents in West Germany. The prospect of remaining behind alone was not a particularly pleasant one, but, so long as I saw the faintest prospect of the extremists in the Socialist Unity Party being removed or at least forced to revert to the Party's original ideals, I felt it my duty to remain. I did not flatter myself that I alone could bring about any change for the better but it was always possible that, if Ulbricht and his satellites proceeded to extreme measures against me, many people in East Germany would realize that the same ruthless oppression was threatening them. Had Ulbricht not feared just such a repercussion, he would have removed me much earlier.

It was not until June 17th, 1953, that flight became imperative.

THE popular rising in East Germany that stirred and horrified the whole civilized world and exposed the tyranny of the Ulbricht regime in all its stark reality began to germinate some two years before. In the autumn of 1951, when economic conditions in the Soviet Zone were better than ever before or since, the S.E.D. announced that "national armed forces" were to be set up. A shock of alarm ran through the population. To the industrial worker this could only mean one thing: the economic recovery for which he had worked so hard was now in jeopardy. Inside the Party there was strong and widespread opposition to any form of remilitarization. The old slogan "Never another war" had taken deep roots. There were heated and unresolved discussions in Party Committees and factory meetings throughout the Zone. As many people knew, of course, there were already militarized police forces in existence, but they had been fairly closely confined to their barracks and what the eye does not see the heart does not grieve over. But now they were being asked to accept armed forces as an official and standing commitment. For psychological and economic reasons the idea was repellent.

Finally, by dint of relentless propaganda and a firm assurance by Ulbricht that living standards would not be affected, the S.E.D. managed to swing public opinion in its favour. But there was a new feeling of mistrust among the workers, which was not allayed when the rates of pay for the so-called People's Police became public knowledge. Inefficient workers were seen flocking into the barrack police and receiving

much higher real wages than were paid in any factories.

In spring, 1952, the S.E.D. was compelled to dismiss many of its trained "agitators" in the factories and recruit new talent. Then came a series of discriminatory measures against private enterprises, self-employed craftsmen and tradesmen. The withdrawal of ration cards from these classes of the population roused a storm of protest and a month later the S.E.D. beat a retreat. Inevitably, of course, scapegoats were found to leave the Party leaders ostensibly untarnished, but the workers were not so easily hoodwinked. An injustice had been done and they had righted it. Even that relatively small incident gave them a new consciousness of their power.

They now began to grumble about the failure of the government to reduce prices as it had promised. On the contrary, foodstuffs became markedly scarcer in 1952, even in the State-owned H.O. shops, and for the first time since 1948 prices began to rise. The cost of living also went up in other directions. Workmen's tickets on the railways were increased and cheap Sunday returns were abolished; voluntary subscribers to social insurance had their policies declared null and void, and old-age pensions were reduced. These were only some of the measures taken by the government to reduce expenditure and meet the growing demands of the People's Police.

The mood of the population grew steadily worse and opposition to the Party leaders ran deep into the Party itself. For the first time since 1945 Ulbricht and his supporters were isolated from the great majority of the Party. Arrests of so-called "enemies of the people" merely intensified popular resentment.

Weeks before the spontaneous revolt in June, 1953, there were strikes in East German factories. Leading Trades Union and Party officials were howled down and even chased out of factory meetings, when they attempted to justify the government's measures. It only needed one spark to set the whole of East Germany into a blaze and that spark came when the Government announced its intention of raising all output norms throughout the Zone by 10 per cent. It was clearly laid down

in the East German Labour laws that norms could only be fixed within each individual plant by the official especially detailed, by the shop-steward, and by the shift-leader. An overall 10 per cent increase decided from Berlin would reduce the industrial workers to mere ciphers without the slightest protection against arbitrary decisions by the Party. Factories throughout East Germany came to a virtual standstill.

The Party leaders realized that they had gone too far and the more moderate elements succeeded in convincing Ulbricht that only an official recantation could restore order. But it was too late even for that. A public statement by the Central Committee and Politbüro of the S.E.D. on June 9th, 1953, promised that certain measures would be proposed to the Government (this formal distinction between Party and Government had always been upheld!) which would "correct mistakes which have been made". In fact, the entire policy of the Party since July, 1951, when the setting-up of national defence forces had been announced, was now to be reversed, and all the so-called "enemies of the people" were to be released. But the effect of this confession was the opposite to what was intended.

At eight o'clock on the morning of June 16th eighty building workers in East Berlin's pretentious show-piece, the Stalinallee, refused to work unless the 10 per cent increase of output norms was cancelled. A strong protest meeting became a demonstration and within a few hours a crowd of several thousand was marching to the government buildings in the Leipziger Strasse. At one o'clock the Minister for Heavy Industry, Selbmann, attempted to address the workers but he could not make himself heard and took refuge inside the building.

By the following day the entire Soviet Zone was in a state of revolt. The workers were no longer demanding the cancellation of the 10 per cent increase in norms but the resignation of the government.

On the afternoon of the 17th I passed through Görlitz on the new German-Polish border. Almost half the town now lies on the Polish side of the river Neisse. The streets in the German part of the town were a solid mass of people. The Mayor had to leave the Town Hall and march with the crowd to the Market

Square. He was not manhandled in any way but placed before a microphone and bombarded with questions. He appealed to the crowd to put forward their demands without violence, and, although there were one or two hotheads who called for the destruction of Party offices, they were clearly in a minority. Unfortunately, the First Secretary of the Party showed considerably less courage than the Mayor. He resisted all demands by the crowd to come out and talk to them. They broke into the Party Headquarters—the People's Police gave them every assistance—only to discover that the First Secretary had taken refuge in the Security Police Headquarters. There barricades had been set up, but they were soon swept aside. As the crowd stormed the building itself, one of the Security Police opened fire. The crowd went mad. The over-zealous policeman was lynched and the Party Secretary, gibbering with fear, was frogmarched through the streets to the prison, where all the political prisoners were set free. Not until seven o'clock in the evening, when it was plain that government and Party were powerless to restore order, did the Soviet Commandant declare a state of emergency and order his troops and tanks into the streets.

The Bautzen district was one of the few in East Germany in which the Soviet military authorities intervened before the demonstrations could gather momentum. The L.O.W.A. Bautzen and other key plants were surrounded by Soviet troops in the course of the day. Apart from one or two minor clashes between rioters and soldiers, the town of Bautzen and the surrounding district remained relatively quiet. There was, however, a complete stoppage of work and in many cases the strike leaders were Trades Union officials.

A case that must have been typical for factories all over East Germany arose in my own firm, the Building Union of Bautzen, which, like the L.O.W.A. Bautzen, is a State-owned concern.

On the morning of the 18th my branch manager, Kohbach, a former Lieutenant in the army who after the war had joined the S.E.D., came and asked me if I would accompany him to one of our building sites some miles away, where a particularly

critical strike situation had arisen. He had no experience of such an emergency and was extremely nervous. On the way to the site a Soviet tank passed us, having failed to force the 250 men back to work.

The strike committee had drawn up a resolution, which was read to us by one of the men. I knew, as soon as I heard it, that it would be fatal to pass on such a resolution, for it could only lead to the arrest of the strike committee. I discussed each item with them, pointing out that, in demanding the release of all political prisoners, they were also including those convicted as Nazis, and that no government could seriously consider a demand for a 40 per cent reduction in prices and a 25 per cent reduction in output norms. They finally agreed to redraft their resolution on more realistic lines. It was only when I sat down with the three members of the strike committee to work out a new resolution that I discovered all three of them were members not only of the Trades Union but also of the Party!

A copy of their resolution was sent to the Central Committee, one to the Government, one to the District Committee of the Party and one to the Trades Union headquarters in Berlin.

I know from personal knowledge that this case was no exception. In many industrial concerns the strikes and demonstrations were led by S.E.D. officials and only Russian tanks saved the East German government from being ignominiously flung out. The police and the People's Police, far from stemming the flood, sided in most cases with the workers. A particularly striking example of this was the action taken by the District Commander of the People's Police in the town of Bitterfeld, who refused to issue his men with arms while the demonstrations lasted. The same happened in Magdeburg.

Once the Red Army had restored order, Ulbricht lost no time in taking reprisals. Mass arrests began, which continued for weeks. Inside the Party hierarchy there was a massive purge. The Minister of Justice, Fechner, was dismissed and subsequently expelled from the Party for stating that membership of a strike committee was not a punishable offence. He was succeeded by the notorious woman judge, Hilde Benjamin. The Minister of State Security, Zaisser, and the editor of the

Party newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, were expelled from the Central Committee for defeatism and "faction making". The Minister of Transport, Weinberger, was severely admonished for "capitulating in the face of hostile agitators". And Ulbricht's chief rival, Anton Ackermann, was not re-elected to the newly constituted Politbüro. From now on any semblance of democratic socialism disappeared; East Germany was a police state.

WHEN I received a summons to appear before the Party Control Commission at the end of June, I could only assume that they were now about to confront me with the choice between crawling back into the Party on my hands and knees or taking the consequences. I little dreamt what was really in store for me!

The entire Commission was assembled with Ambrosius May, after a brief and calamitous career as Party Secretary in the L.O.W.A. Bautzen, now its Chairman. He grinned broadly as I entered the room. A moment later I knew why. In view of my exemplary conduct during the recent disturbances, he announced, the Central Committee had decided that my past errors should be overlooked and I should be received back unconditionally into the Party.

He and the other members of the Commission were obviously anticipating a most moving scene, in which I thanked the Central Committee, with tears in my eyes, for its magnanimity in taking back its prodigal son. But, when I had recovered from my first shock of surprise, I felt neither relief nor gratitude. I explained that any action I had taken on June 17th and 18th had not been motivated by a desire to help the Central Committee, but, on the contrary, to see that the few workers I was able to influence presented their just demands without running the risk of being punished afterwards. Unfortunately, there were already signs that the people now running the Party had refused to learn the bitter lesson of June 17th. The so-called "New Course" was a mere stay of execution.

No, it was not I but the Central Committee that needed forgiveness.

To say that this was badly received is a gross understatement. May and his colleagues were filled with righteous indignation. When I left that meeting I knew that my days as a free man were numbered. I also knew that to allow myself to be arrested and put out of the way would be false heroics. So long as the Red Army remained in East Germany, Ulbricht would never allow another revolt, whether personal or popular, to loosen his stranglehold.

One not altogether happy circumstance had already operated in my favour. A few days after my stormy meeting with the Control Commission my wife received news that her mother was seriously ill in West Germany. She was given permission to travel to the West with the child. The cumbersome working of a totalitarian machine was, in this case, a blessing in disguise for, had the Central Committee taken action on my refusal to accept reinstatement, my wife would not have been allowed to travel.

As a matter of fact, the Party was still undecided. The District Headquarters, one of my informants told me, received a confidential enquiry from Berlin, whether my arrest would cause much of a sensation in Bautzen. The answer was not encouraging and it was decided to have me shadowed by two members of the Security Police. It now became virtually impossible for me to talk with anyone outside my place of work, for they immediately became suspect. The final news of my impending arrest only reached me by the most devious route and through the courage and kindness of friends, whom I cannot, of course, name.

I had six days to plan my escape. Although a special permit was necessary in order to travel to East Berlin, that seemed the simplest route to take. Fortunately the Director of my firm was not a member of the Party and almost certainly knew nothing about the latest developments. He gave me the permit without hesitation, when I told him that I proposed to discuss my situation once more with the Central Committee. I also asked him to say nothing about my trip as I did not want the

District Headquarters of the Party to queer my pitch. Again he agreed without a murmur.

These last few days in East Germany were among the most painful of my life. It is not in my nature to run away and, although my resolve was unshaken, my mind was tortured with questions and doubts. Not least because I had no illusions about how I would be received. Certainly not with open arms. That was hardly to be expected. But I felt sure that I would not even be given the credit for having flown out of conviction and not out of expediency. Still, I had survived much greater trials before, and in any case I had reached the point of no return.

I had decided to travel by night, reaching East Berlin in the early morning when it would presumably be easier to find my way across to the Western Sectors. I had succeeded in shaking off my shadows and spent the last few hours with friends. Then, shortly after midnight, I set off alone through the deserted streets. Everything I possessed I had left behind. I took with me only the clothes I was wearing, about five pounds in East marks and a brief case which contained documents that might be of use to me later.

Everything had gone so smoothly that I was conscious only of the abandoned moonlit streets I had come to know so well and a terrible feeling of emptiness. But one final shock was still to come.

The first person I set eyes on as I entered the station was Ambrosius May. My heart leapt into my mouth. This could only mean one thing: my plan had somehow been discovered. I had to think quickly.

I nodded to May and made for the gentlemen's lavatory. He made no attempt to follow me and he seemed to be alone. This might, after all, be a coincidence. I decided to try and bluff it out.

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" I asked him, as I approached.

"Waiting for someone from Dresden. And you?"

I had my story-ready. A trip to Görlitz to inspect two building sites first thing in the morning. I enquired when he was going to have me arrested.

He gave me a cynical smile. That was up to the Security Police.

"I've finished with you," he added.

"That's mutual," I replied as I made for the ticket office, and I have often wondered since if he remembered these parting words when he heard of my flight.

Strangely enough, as soon as I left him, all my suspicions came crowding back and my nerves tautened almost to breaking point. Waiting on the platform for the Berlin train to come in, I had to exercise considerable self-restraint to prevent myself from looking constantly over my shoulder. Then came the interminable period between the arrival and departure of the train, when every footstep up to the door of my compartment or down the corridor set my nerves quivering.

Twice during the journey my papers were examined by People's Police. I knew I had nothing to fear now and yet the possibility of a last-minute hitch could not be ruled out. In the end the critical moment came and went as casually as any morning stroll. As soon as I arrived in Berlin I took the Metropolitan Railway to the Friedrichstrasse station and walked from there down the Leipziger Strasse, East Berlin's Whitehall, to the Potsdamer Platz, the square through which the sector boundary runs. The barriers had not been taken down since June 17th and only a narrow pavement led from East to West. At one end stood two People's Policemen with rifles slung over their shoulders, at the other two West Berlin police. Although it was eight o'clock in the morning I seemed to be entirely alone in the huge open square. As I approached the boundary, the two People's Police paused on their beat to glance across at me and, without quite realizing what I was doing, I began to whistle. The next moment I was in West Berlin. I was a refugee.

